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Women & Abuse: Their Meaning of Safety

by

Elizabeth Anne Hughson

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Educational Psychology

Edmonton, Alberta

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ABSTRACT

Our everyday experiences in the workplace, home, institution, and community make us aware of the presence of abuse and violence but we are often unaware of what it means to take measures to find or create safety from those interactions that lead to acts or threats of physical and/or emotional harm. This hermeneutic phenomenological study examines the notion of safety with women who had been abused by their intimate partners in an attempt to better understand their encounters with the construct of safety. Three women, mothers between thirty and fifty years, with one to fifteen years of experience apart from their abusive partners, participated in multiple in-depth transcribed interviews that revealed six sub themes and three major themes of the experience. The experience of safety is understood as a state of mind, a presence felt. Feelings of safety were first described by childhood memories of carefully crafted family stories, feelings later longed for, a palpable "knowing" of safety, once the disappointments accumulated. Getting to a safer state comes from taking action, paying attention, not waiting for protection. Finding a state of mind that felt safe provides a mirror to knowing the self. This new knowledge of self leads to a sense of personal and spiritual connection, forgiveness and optimism for a shift in power and love. This internal construct of safety has a different authority, she has information that offers an altered analysis of herself in relation to the outside world. In one sense the meaning of safety is first imagined in childhood, but in many ways it is understood as a struggle to feel that safe "place". It must be pursued by resisting old myths and finding

personal authority. Sustaining a safer "place" takes vigilance, optimism, and a spiritual sense of connection.

In closing, the limitations of analysis of description are determined by practical considerations that anchor any such interpretations in time and context. However, when the notion of safety was explored in this thesis, a woman's "knowing" and acting portrayed hope that was inextricably linked to a safer place for her and her children.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There is another sense in which learning can be coming home, for the process of learning turns a strange context into a familiar one, and finally into a habitation of mind and heart. The world we live in is the one we are able to perceive; it becomes gradually more intelligible and more accessible with the building up of coherent mental models. Learning to know a communtiy or a landscape is homecoming. Creating a vision of that comunity or landscape is homemaking.

(Bateson, 1994, p. 213)

It has always been family and friends who have been there to encourage, inspire and enrich my life immeasurably. Throughout this project they never failed to support every phase, and for this I am forever grateful. Roger has gently held my hand, brushed my hair and cooked the dinners through the pain, the flailing and the joy of completion. Jesse and Kate always offered love and laughter, whether I could be with them or not, and their loyal generostiy sustains and protects me forever. My parents' love and steadfast kindness have always kept me safe, especially to do this work. Norrie is always there to keep me grounded and I am forever grateful for her devotion to me and my family. Debbie's voice and faith are ever with me, and I will always be grateful for her cheerful willingness to take on more work so I could finish mine.

I have been saved and held by the love of many friends and I can only inarticulately use this opportunity to express my appreciation to them.

Three amazing women made this work worth doing. I humbly thank them for caring and daring to participate. Their achievements offer hope in these times.

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Finally, there were time when I was even grateful for that three hundred kilometer stretch of highway that gave time for nothing but thoughts.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

One of the most difficult aspects of doing research is getting started. How do I find a researchable problem? How do I narrow it down sufficiently to make it workable or "do-able?" There are a number of sources of researchable problems; those problems suggested by others, the contradictions or ambiguities in the research/technical literature, as well as personal and professional experience. An examination of my personal and professional experience led to a judgment that there were features of my work that were less than effective, human, or equitable - all of which posed researchable problems to ponder. Pondering such concerns, revealed more clearly, my motives for research. It seemed that my professional work had been encouraged by an ambition for reform, mixed with a curiosity and concern for "how the world works." As my work and volunteer experiences were remembered and as the timing for this project became possible, I was drawn to question the nature of a woman's notions of safety in a world characterized by daily violence. Such preoccupations led to thinking of ways to research the problem - reflecting not only my hopes, but, sometimes, my despair. In retrospect, the pragmatic need to explore a "doable," if not always "clear," problem seemed to be colored by my desire to contribute something "relevant." Indeed, reform ambitions often seemed to creep into my thoughts and intentions, challenging my efforts to set them aside while in the business of conducting a disciplined inquiry. Perhaps

it was because I could not ignore the influences of my earlier experiences. These thoughts led to the decision to speak of them first, in order to bring context to this work.

I felt too young when events forced me to wonder what it might take to feel safe in this world. Clearly, I did not understand what it **meant** to be vulnerable. As an eighteen year old, second year undergraduate student of psychology I was hired, sight unseen, as a "nurse's aide." The job was in a large custodial institution, and I was assigned to the locked ward with seventy-two women who were labeled "low grades." In keeping with the hierarchy of the institution, these women were congregated in one building, labeled as the lowest functioning patients in a place that housed over 2,000 people. Many of them did not speak, all were physically mobile, all were heavily medicated, some had lived in an institution all their lives, some had ended up there after years in another "mental" institution, and some were locked, twenty-four hours a day, naked, in barren "side-cells," rubber mattress dragged in at night. Most wandered around the ward barely clothed, many had their teeth pulled out, and many silently engaged in self-injurious behavior or screamed as they banged their heads. I was told over and over "these people" did not feel pain, hot, cold, or emotions. They were not like us. They could be violent.

Women, from the other wards, who had tried to escape or had committed other misdemeanors, were punished by being brought to our ward, where they were stripped naked and locked in barren cells, reserved for such cases. The

women who did not sleep in the cells, slept in single metal beds, side by side, in double rows without bedside tables, closets or the benefit of curtains on any of the windows. Men, from the Department of Public Works, would sometimes stare through the windows as they pretended to do repairs around the place. Most women could feed themselves, but about twenty or so were fed pureed meals by staff. All women were routinely "toiletted" at the same time, herded to toilets that were lined up in a row without partitions, a single button to flush them at the same time. Enemas were regularly "administered." Some smeared their feces on the walls and over their bodies. Women were also paraded into a shower area where staff hosed them down every second day. Other than feeding, bathing, toiletting, and medicating the women, the all - female staff were required to keep the ward clean, fold the laundry and make the women get up and go to bed at the right times. The staff were efficient at these tasks and did not take kindly to any disruptions that delayed or interrupted their breaks. The women were put to bed (many tied in their beds) by 4:30 in the afternoon and awakened at 6:00 in the morning. These women's life routines were created and maintained to accommodate the shift schedules. The quietest shift was, of course, the late night shift, and sometimes staff were a little kinder then. We were not allowed to interact with the women other than to make sure they did what they were supposed to do. We were told not to get to know them or to play "favorites." It was safer that way.

However, there were many tales of horror passed on by the seasoned staff to the fresh batch of innocents like myself. They scared me to death, but I worked hard not to show it. I did not want to be laughed at again, after the tricks they played in the first weeks of my initiation to the ways of the ward. That first night I had been ordered to sit with a dead body until they took her away. One story, often repeated to explain the huge bolts and extra locks on the doors of one special side-cell where "Vicky" lived, was particularly horrific. The woman behind those locks was said to be so violent that she could rip the steel doors off the hinges. She was permanently locked in a cell with only a drain in the floor, born in the institution, said to be the child of a woman who had been raped while in another institution. Most women had been placed in the institution either by parents or the "government" because they were "stupid, idiots, too much of a burden," to live in the community. Over the months that I worked there, no one ever came from the outside to visit any of the women. A few women kept old letters or cards from family members, secreted in the clothing the institution provided, and sometimes they would carefully show me the faded, deeply creased pieces of paper. The letters were over ten years old. They must have been important.

This was my first intense, overpowering experience with the outcome of systemic violence and abuse. The memories continue to shatter most illusions I have about what people are capable of doing in the name of "caring for those less fortunate than ourselves." It was only a glimpse into how a life

can turn out if you are rejected, abandoned, devalued and feared. It is also a constant reminder of what I became as a young women paid to "look after" other women. I was not impervious to the expectations, the social messages, the codes of behavior or the fear of the consequences of not conforming to the practices modeled by the other staff. Although I lived in constant fear and disgust, I did as I was told and acted just like the other women on staff. I felt powerless to change anything. I was silent, and I succumbed, doing my part to maintain the status quo, to be safe. Only my body betrayed me. I had continuous minor ailments, gum disease, tooth aches, insomnia, and a tendency to stay up all night partying. The matron diagnosed me as having a "chronic, low-grade infection" and I was not allowed to donate blood. It was my first time away from home.

I did get angry but only well after I had left the job and tried to tell my stories to others. It is only now, as I write this dissertation, that I can touch the horror, the grief, the loss of innocence, and the pain that I denied feeling, all pushed aside. Instead, I chose a cold, driving, focused anger that would keep me going for many years - the other feelings pushed down inside of me. Only twenty-seven years later, can I feel safe to cry over those memories. I can only speculate that I did not have the language, tools for analysis or the life experiences to process and feel what I witnessed and what I participated in, so long ago. I was young then, I had grown up in a safe, middle-class, loving home with parents who valued me, expected me to get educated and to

contribute. I had to deny the blatant degradation and violence of that summer. I could not look at it too closely, because I did not understand. I had to go on, I had to have hope, and I used my self-righteous anger to believe that I could fix "the system," "save people" from such snakepits and thus "do no harm." But I externalized all my "blaming" and it took many years to gain insight into the part I play as one person in relation to another. I certainly did not understand the role I played in the oppressive, devaluation of others who were labeled as different.

In fact, I went on to become a "better psychologist," another professional expert, objectively assessing abilities and deficits, determining what was best for people by administering standardized, well-researched (valid and reliable) tests that would help me to categorize, label, and predict. I helped to create various community-based training programs for adults who had been labeled as developmentally delayed, while getting an M.Sc. in Educational Psychology; specialization "Clinical." Throughout graduate school, I continued with the agency who had hired me as a research assistant the summer after I had been in the institution. It was a new agency that promised to repatriate and rehabilitate the "cream of the crop," those adults from that same institution and young adults who were leaving special schools, those we predicted would make good candidates for community living. By applying scientifically researched techniques in a simulated environment, we would teach them how to behave so they could get jobs and live independently in the community.

This job became my vocation. It seemed to hold promise. It treated people who were labeled as mentally handicapped as human beings. We had many arguments about what labels would be least offensive to people. It was scientific, progressive, emancipating and it would not leave things to the evils of random or ignorant thoughtlessness. It was exciting. We felt we were on the cutting edge of social reform, delivering a service that would give people with mental retardation a "real" life in the community. We believed in the concept of "team work," the notion of "community living," and a belief in individual rights, dignity and choices. We acted with a confidence in the empirical, scientific method, with a conviction that we could systematically manipulate and control all of the critical environmental variables and teach people functional behaviors that would give them the skills to overcome the terrible lives that they had experienced to date. They would "graduate" and live decent lives among the rest of us in the community. It seemed like we were part of "changing the world." I could erase the nightmare I had lived through. In no time, I was asked to open the first "group home" for nine women discharged from the institution because they seemed to be good candidates who might "make it" in the community. So upon my return from a three week honeymoon, my new husband and I moved into a large house to live with nine women. We tried to ignore their pasts in hopes of a brighter future. I was just 21 years of age. None of us talked about how scared we were of each other.

In addition to living with nine women, I worked during the day at the agency conducting individual assessments and creating prescriptive programs for young adults who were developmentally and/or physically disabled and were there to learn vocational and community living skills. I continued in this job finishing graduate school, then moving on to other programmatic and research responsibilities over the next seven years. We were involved in large, federally funded research projects that struggled to create the perfect functional assessment tools and companion program packages that would train any adult with intellectual impairments how to become "functionally independent." Monthly we assessed people on a battery of tests, repeating the tests at equal intervals, presenting the same items in the same manner to ensure the highest probability of measuring "real" change, testing their readiness for the real world in a safe facility with test items that were just like the "real thing," and always teaching to the test in carefully selected groupings of those who functioned "at the same level." Growing bolder, we moved on to group five or six people together to live in duplexes where they could learn the pre-requisite residential skills to become "independent in the community." It was all very scientific, data was collected religiously. We wrote scientific papers, presented at professional conferences, designed and standardized new tests, and I co-authored several books. We were all still young, enthusiastic, rigorous and hopeful. We were making the world a safer place. We collected data as the same people grew older and more compliant, never "graduating."

Then I ran away from my job. I could not find a safe or smart way to make changes, everything started to become too familiar, too structured, too controlling. I escaped for three months, in a VW van, headed for the coast with a girlfriend. I did not know how to gracefully face leaving all the people I had come to love, the guilt of giving in, the exhaustion of working day and night, the fear of trying something else, the need to re-examine my identity, the possibility that I could be someone else. I just knew that I felt too responsible for everything and that my body had betrayed me again. I was wandering around with pneumonia and pleurisy; I had trouble breathing. I was an Associate Director of a big agency, the boss of too many staff, and I was only 29 years old. I never cried.

I remember finding my way back to work, taking a job at the University, starting a new clinical outreach service and teaching in a new degree program to train community rehabilitation professionals to conduct research and implement programs that would support people with disabilities. It was the beginning of a different identity (professor) and offered the promise that I would have the power and privilege to do things differently. It was new, exciting, and I saw it as a place to influence social change closer to the source of the problem. I was still optimistic but I was not very insightful. What I really had found was a high-status, safe place, some distance from the lives of the devalued people I had known. The office was hidden away in a rabbit warren of confusing buildings and hallways. Even parking was at a premium.

But, I believed that as we learned more about oppression, devaluation, marginalization, empowerment, social justice, individualization, specialized interventions, and inclusionary practices, we would do research and teach in ways that would change the nature of human service delivery systems and improve the practices of professionals. As a result, people with disabilities would take their rightful place in our communities, contributing and leading lives they chose. I thought we would do this by scientifically researching cause and effect relationships, looking for the best match between interventions and observed behaviors, systematically influencing values and attitudes by presenting rational arguments to expose the violent and abusive consequences of prejudicial negative stereotypes and exclusionary practices, and by championing the collaborative efforts of consumer partnerships and interdisciplinary teams that worked together to constructively solve problems and reduce the impact of individual deficiencies. It was safer, just telling other people the "right" thing to do.

It seemed worth doing, but, soon enough, I was perceived as unqualified to continue in these endeavors without more advanced academic credentials. I started to take things personally. The job no longer made so much sense. I decided to have babies. I left the university for several years to follow my husband in his career. When we returned, I wanted my identity back. I became a tenured university professor, full time. But it was not long before they reminded me that, although I continued to publish and conduct research at an

acceptable level, I was not academically "complete." It was not a totally safe place for me to be.

I started to take things personally, again. I began to work more directly with women with developmental disabilities who had survived physical and sexual abuse. I began to listen carefully, to see the possibilities of mutual support, the power of a group of women, the potential for healing, to feel the need to grieve and the courage to act. I began to learn about personal agency by sharing some time with brave and forgiving women who were learning to speak for themselves. It felt a little safer. I started to question the role of victim. Over those years, I also became a Board member of a battered women's emergency shelter, providing a refuge for 32 women and their children. I learned many things and I tried to remember all the things I had witnessed and been a party to when I had worked in institutions and other, segregated, congregated-care facilities designed to help devalued people get better and live in the community.

But even as the President of the Board, I was not able to keep the "train from rolling down the track," and, God knows, the shelter was in desperate demand. Over 900 women and 1,000 children used it and that many were turned away every year. I woke up many nights worrying that we would have to decide to raise more money to build yet another shelter to hide women away from their partners, their families and their friends to keep them safe (and perhaps silent). Out of sight and out of mind. It had a familiar ring.

Over those last seven years, my choice of reading material had changed dramatically. I began to read the work of feminist scholars, post-modern sociologists, post-Freudian analysts, post-modern philosophers, philosophers, anthropologists, socio-biologists, critical theorists, discourse analysts, ethnographers, and social psychologists. Many of the writers that interested me were not from North America. I began to experience the limitations of the formal education I had received, restricted as it had been by a post-empiricist (reductionistic, positivistic, probabilistic, objective and measurable) perspective where education was believed to be the "transmission" of cognitive knowledge and skills. Emotionally, I felt cheated, overwhelmed, guilty that I had missed thinking about the ideas in those books, yet, intellectually, I was excited. Something felt like "coming home" and it set me to remembering my (secret) ways of thinking and knowing. Ways that I had learned to ignore, feeling that they were not rational, logical or true. Before all this reading and reflecting, I sometimes assumed that I was just not smart enough to act like a good scientist/academic. Now I wanted to put it to the test, take some risks. It was a good time to go back to school, to be a student again. To study and do research offered the possibility of some "healing" through the efforts of the present study.

The personal experiences I was having with survivors of sexual abuse, spending time at the women's shelter, teaching my students, struggling with close friends, all gave me pause for reflection. The reading and the personal

struggles became the foundation for greater introspection, retrospection and a search for "its" quality, for "its" meaning. What had brought me to my work? What stories had I forgotten? I seemed to be at the "right age" to apply for a sabbatical. Now I was getting old. Would advancing age make it safer for me to think and to act?

Upon acceptance into a Ph.D. program I looked for courses that would allow me to pursue the interests generated by my earlier readings about theories of knowledge. I was fortunate to find a few such courses along with the support and guidance of several professors who encouraged me to pursue my worries about the meaning of such a fundamental concept as safety for women who experience violence and abuse. I gained a new appreciation for the historical, social context of the nature of violence and the use of power and domination in human interactions. I asked questions that meant looking at alternative points of view on social phenomenon. I remembered that life is social, subjective, internal, and colored by feelings and opinions. We act in a social context, there is a process, a perspective, and knowledge that influences the development of completed acts. I read about qualitative research methods.

I explored the public and professional interpretations and responses that western society generates to deal with, what seems like never-ending, violence towards women. What were useful research questions? As I reflected on my previous training in research methodology, my exposure to other theories and traditions, and my shifting beliefs about the nature of knowledge, I felt the need

to step away from the search for "hard" data that could be frozen into statistical interpretations. Coupled with my personal history and it's obvious influence intellectually and emotionally, I wanted to start my research about the meaning of safety for women by having conversations with women who might tell me their stories. I wanted to talk about what they knew about feeling safe in a violent world. I wanted to describe what some women know, to conduct this project believing that "women mattered," and I had an urgency to do this project with a focus on action and change in everyday life. It was important to listen to women who had been abused tell their stories of survival. I wanted to transcribe their reflections and analysis, ponder their questions, and interpret and articulate the meanings embedded in those experiences through conversations that may have no end. I chose to do this in the context of exploring and describing the place women have in our culture. The interface of all of the above, is in fact, the proposal of this study.

The Issue of Safety for Women in a Violent Society

The context of my concern and experience with shelters was a preface to an appropriate and realistic paradigm from which to propose a study to learn more about safety from women who had either entered a shelter or had found a way to leave the violence in their homes. What were the assumptions about shelters as safe places? The "private" matter that women are beaten by their intimate partners has only recently been of public interest. Currently there is a public agenda that has agreed to provide a social response to this problem by

building safe places to which women may flee. The professional staffing and public funding of such shelters has not reduced the enormity of the problem for women. There is still little agreement about what it would take to ensure that women and their children are safe in their homes and in their communities. Statistics clearly indicate that, in the majority of cases of violence against women, the victims and perpetrators are known to each other and share some sort of relationship. When we frame the problem as one of having to create places for women to escape to, so much may go unanswered, unexplored, in understanding how we, as a society, as individuals, think about women's safety in the face of such wide-spread violence. We want to understand, to act, but, in fact, the women are no longer with us. They have "gone away," sheltered from the men who live among us.

Nevertheless, there is an increasing demand for shelters for battered women in Canada. In Calgary, for example, the three emergency shelters turn away as many women and children as the number served each year. Such a situation leads many to assume that more such facilities are needed. But is this the only, or most appropriate and effective response to the violence women live with in our homes, workplaces, institutions and communities? The major assumption of most shelters is that the service provides a refuge, a sanctuary, a safe place. Yet there has been little investigation of women's perceptions of the nature of safety and support she needs in the face of abuse and violence. Perhaps, as we extend the present model of shelters, we need to investigate

whether such professionally operated, residential, congregate-care facilities offer the support and safety that women at risk need or whether such institutions, in fact, further devalue a woman and render her more vulnerable. Thinking about women's knowledge about safety may be another beginning point, a place that can open up new ways to think about how we frame the problem in order to think about multiple solutions.

The public responses to address society's responsibility for the safety of women facing violence has been to provide places of refuge. Such congregated care facilities, created from the voluntary commitment of many women, have, over the last decade, been legitimized by public funds. Funds have led to staffing shelters with human service workers and the growth of professionalization of social supports available to the women who have been battered (Hoff, 1990). Awareness and access to shelters have resulted in most facilities being stretched beyond capacity and professionals and volunteers are forced to consider duplicating and extending the model to meet the demand.

Given the usual nature of shelters as places where a number of women live together for short periods of time, it is useful to ask whether social supports influence a woman's sense of safety. There are assumptions and implications associated with the intentions for social support within shelters. Most shelters in North America are designed to offer physical safety in a building that is protected from outsiders and is designed to offer a "home-like" atmosphere with other women. As such, the early history of shelters was founded on the

notion that women could protect other women from their abusive partners by providing a safe physical space and by extending emotional, social and instrumental support that would encourage the abused women to feel understood and accepted. It was also believed that being with other women who had experienced violence would result in mutual aide and support for women to make acceptable changes that would stop the violence in their lives. But the question still remains, does living with other women offer a sense of support that feels safe? Does it extend beyond the few safe hours in a place of refuge. Does this mean that the woman knows and understands what it takes to feel safe? Do professional shelter staff and volunteers influence a woman's sense of being safe? Are her stories locked behind the doors of the shelter, is the meaning of her experience lost? As Susan Heald (1994) suggests, if we have no community to tell our story to; if there is no place to tell it publicly, then, privately we lie to ourselves. Perhaps this shelter, this quiet refuge, is a form of "silencing," a way to forget what is important to our collective and personal safety. On the other hand, we have not wholeheartedly embraced the effort it takes to insist that there are enough shelters to meet the demand. As Wolf (1993) points out that although "domestic violence" is the number - one crime in America, the United Way targets only .5 percent of its budget to shelters, while across the United States, there are five times more shelters for abused animals than there are for women.

Some research has explored the role of social support in influencing battered women's sense of safety. Hoff (1990) focused on social network members, societal norms and values about marriage, women, the family and violence in her research of factors which influence battered women. Her findings indicated that social network members did influence the women in their attempts to cope with battering and its long-term after-effects. Family members generally were positive, but agency (formal) supports (except for shelter staff) were not supportive. Hoff concluded that the problem of violence against women can be attributed in part to traditional ideologies which serve to justify and maintain the status quo, beliefs that members of the social network share. Such customary ideas include male dominance and beliefs and practices which assert that the women is primarily responsible for the family. Her research revealed that, although the women's natural social network members strongly disapproved of violence and were generally supportive, often they were **not** able to help for complex reasons. Some family members were dismayed to learn that the women had kept the knowledge of violence from them. These complex interactional processes between personal and social factors were described as powerful, oppressive and created a climate which could trap women in unsafe relationships.

Prior to an analysis of individual experience (or data) it is important to investigate the meaning of safety. This means keeping in mind the need to conceptually examine safety from several angles. It means questioning the

interpretations of violence towards women and meanings we attach to those interpretations. A feminist analysis sees violence as the consequences of social, economic, and political inequalities built into the structure of society and reinforced through assumptions expressed in the language and ideologies of sexism, racism and class. Even the Canadian Panel On Violence Against Women (1993) names these inequalities, offering an interpretation that is foundational to most discussions of the social context of violence against women. Any analysis of violence against women demands a recognition of the complex ways in which inequality and power imbalances structure the lives of Canadian women.

Women live within a social fabric that is textured by inequality, a reality that leaves us vulnerable to violence. As long as women have unequal access to choice and freedom, as long as women live with the fear of violence, their options will be restricted, their movements curtailed and their lives and the lives of their children vitally affected. But as the Final Report of the Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women (1993) indicates, it is important not to portray women as the passive victims of violence or of male power. It has been women who have brought the issue of violence to the attention of the public, and it is women who have developed the essential analysis of violence against women. It is also almost exclusively women who work in transition houses, sexual assault centers, women's health clinics and crisis centers. These women are in the forefront of dealing with violence against women. Women

have struggled for legal reform and for increased funding and expansion of social and support services. Women are the survivors of atrocities, not the passive victims. This fact is also meaningful in understanding the context of violence and the nature of power and domination in our culture. Women have contributed emerging theories of knowledge that influence understanding about power and violence in our western culture.

Throughout this century, feminist theorists have examined the nature of oppressive social arrangements based on sex, race and class. This has included a critique of the central organizing principle of much of Western thought, which lies in the nature of a set of oppositional dualisms. Dualisms - either/or, you/me, good/bad, high/low - are so deeply embedded in Western knowledge structures, that they often seem like natural categories. Critics have observed that this assumption of dualism generally includes a hierarchical relationship between the terms, valuing one and devaluing the other. For example, the phrases "black and white" and "light and dark" are frequently used in ways that valorize the light and the white and that impugn the dark or black as wrong, dangerous or mysterious. Such assumptions, built into language and unspoken cultural agreements about the "good" or the "real," have the result of naturalizing social inequities to make them appear unchangeable or inevitable. Feminist theorists further observe that women as a class or group have been, throughout Western history, associated with the devalued characteristics in such pairs. The primary dualisms of Western

thought that feminist theorists have identified as particularly instrumental in legitimizing women's subordination, are those between reason and emotion, private and public, nature and culture, subject and object, and mind and body. Each of these pairs of concepts have served to conceptually relegate women to peripheral, secondary, or inferior status (Cirksena & Cuklanz, 1992).

My personal analysis suggests that theories associated with examining the influence of oppositional dualism, the organizing principle basic to our way of knowing, offer useful interpretations to understanding the danger facing anyone who is devalued - in this case, women. The radical feminist treatment of the dualism of culture and nature offer a central thesis: that men's treatment of women and nature is violent (Daly, 1984; Dvorkin, 1974). Such feminists provide accounts of the pervasiveness of misogyny and violence against women and their work has contributed to the domain of feminist theories.

For centuries western thought has maintained the social arrangement of women as the reproducer and nurturer of children and men in the private sphere while men have been in charge at home and in the public domain. The consequence for women includes taking personal responsibility for any domestic problems that in reality have roots embedded in the social institutions and values that are well beyond the privacy of the family.

So it is, perhaps, not surprising that everyday and academic interest in this topic of violence towards women has been influenced by the prevailing ideology which maintains oppressive social arrangement based on sex, race

and class. Thus, the questions that we often ask, reflect this (un)conscious perpetuation of the devaluation of women. We blame the battered women. We ask: Why does she stay? What is wrong with her? Why isn't she smarter? What did she do to provoke him? Other questions are often ignored or repressed: Why are men violent towards women? Why do men beat their wives and not their bosses? Why must the women flee? Why are violent men allowed to stay in the home? Why are women not safe in their homes? What would it take for women to be safe? It may be assumed that such questions will be pertinent to the analysis of this study.

To understand that all women are the survivors of violence committed by men against them collectively or individually begins to erode the belief that it is rational to blame the victim for her abuse. Some researchers would argue that violence will only stop when every person, man or woman, no longer defends the violence as acceptable behavior and begins to understand just how such acts come about in our culture and why they continue (Walker, 1979). In this violent society many women have learned to survive the stress and crises through their own hard work and often with the support of other women (Caplan, 1964; Geertz, 1973). Yet other women and their children continue to lose their homes and sometimes their lives. The psychological, physical and social well-being of all women is still threatened by violence or the risk of violence and as such form part of the generic rationale for this study.

It is interesting to note that the 1970 Canadian Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women did not mention the issue of violence against women. We might assume that its omission was not because it did not exist, but because women have had a long history of being silenced. Academics, politicians, activists and human service workers have more recently taken an interest in the topic of violence and wife abuse and made it their agenda. The typical non-political stance of the researcher or the helping professional has led to diagnosing the problem of abuse in individualized, medical or psychiatric terms and an offer to fix the woman on the basis of this framework (assess, diagnose, treat) while ignoring the political and social context (Walker, 1979). Meanwhile activist women have worked hard to protect the battered women while trying to change the social and political environment (Hoff, 1990). Each approach has been criticized. The professional, in her eagerness to fix, diagnoses the woman and ignores the social influences and the activist, in her passion for cultural change, ignores the search for knowledge through the objective identification of real cause and effect.

Understanding the concept of patriarchy in our culture further contextualizes the present study. It is important to an analysis of the nature of gender inequality and its impact on the risk of violence against women, and to our tolerance of male violence against women. Patriarchy in its wider meaning is:

> The manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general. It implies that men

> hold power in all the important institutions in society and that women are deprived of access to such power. It does not imply that women are either totally powerless, or totally deprived of rights, influence and resources, but, certainly women as a group have less power, less influence and fewer resources than men.
>
> (Lerner, 1986, p. 239)

In the social structures and dynamics of a patriarchal society women and men have gender-specific roles in the power structure which, among other things, legitimizes male authority. Some men consider domination and control of women as their right; using violence when they see fit is not challenged. This in turn leads to widespread tolerance of male violence at both the individual and institutional levels. The treatment of women, their labor, their reproductive capacity and their sexuality as commodities is certainly not just a product of modern industrial and capitalist society; it has been that way since long before the creation of Western civilization. Over time, women became a resource and a form of property acquired and controlled by men.

Today, the modern society and its supporting institutions, have broadened the locus of power from the patriarchy in the family to a patriarchal state that reflects and sustains gender inequalities in a variety of ways and locations in the social structure. Although the family model and the state help to sustain inequality among men and women, this does not deny that most women have established greater relative equality over time, but they have done so in the context of a patriarchal society. The nature of gender relations and inequality in our patriarchal society can be further understood within an elaboration of the

concept of heterosexism, a set of ideas about men and women and the relationship between them.

The Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women (1993) defines heterosexism as the assumption that a woman's life will be organized around and defined in relation to a man. It falsely presumes that all women will marry and have children, and that all worthy paths for women lead to marriage and motherhood. Opposition to heterosexism is often unfairly seen as an attack on the institution of marriage and motherhood. However, to attack heterosexism means to support women's equality by upholding her right to be defined as an autonomous, independent person rather than being defined only in relation to men and children. It recognizes the diverse roles a woman plays and frees her to attach priorities to the roles she sees fit. Canadian society is organized around compulsory heterosexuality. Our cultural and societal institutions function as if the primary role for women is that of wife and mother caring for her husband and bearing and nurturing children. In the ideal, she is the archetypal Madonna: demure, slight, beautiful, chaste, deferential, passive, co-operative, alluring and servile. These feminine attributes prepare her to marry and be relegated to the private domain of the family. Her greatest assigned values are her reproductive capacity and her commitment to family. Her domestic labor remains unpaid; her paid work remains underpaid.

In antithesis to the ideal women, the ideal man is the protector and the breadwinner. He is seen to be best equipped for the role if he is bold, strong,

powerful, active, competitive, virile and in command. These masculine characteristics have high value in the private realm of the family where he is seen to be the head of the household, and in the public spheres of commerce, law and politics. He is presumed to want a career first and then to be a husband. His masculine qualities are valued highly and are well rewarded in the marketplace. He carries these qualities with him into the public world where they become the core philosophy and where structures are crafted to suit the male experience.

We continue to live with the legacy of these archetypes. Families, religion, politics, media, and education are all organized around the concept of heterosexism and consistently reinforce and re-create the idea by rewarding those who most closely conform and by punishing those who dare to be different. Heterosexism is evident in women's worries about appearance, eating disorders, reluctance to play in sports and hiding academic achievements to avoid appearing too successful or too smart. The imbalance of power inherent in the masculine and feminine sex roles takes on greater significance when we look at the dynamics of male violence against women. Men are independent; women are dependent on them. When men choose violence as a means of control over women, women have little power to withstand the violence. Even men who do not actively use violence against women often tolerate it by other men. Heterosexism is imbedded in all state institutions wherein women have little influence and power, especially if they do

not fit the idealized image of wife and mother. As such, these women are often not believed, they are blamed for their own suffering and are urged to try harder.

On the surface, women who live within heterosexist boundaries seem better off. Many, without doubt, garner privileges, such as access to male resources, a husband's protection from other men and legitimacy of children born of the relationship. But these are all derivative benefits. The man continues to be the source of support, defines the terms of protection and gives the children his name. The woman is still vulnerable to his will. Even after marriages break down, some men continue to exercise what they believe to be their proprietary rights to their wives and children. It is estimated that women who are separated from their spouses are five times more likely to be killed by their intimate partners than are other women (Crawford & Gartner, 1992). Male anger and rage over the loss of their wives/property apparently have no obvious counterparts in killings of men by female intimate partners. "If I can't have her, no one will have her" is the ultimate expression of the patriarchy family ideology. Such views lead to an obvious "social" need for a study of safety for women in the hopes of preventing such dire consequences.

Toward a Definition of Violence

As a further aspect of an attempt to understand or analyze the issues of safety, a definition of violence is critical. To conceptualize safety requires an understanding of what violence is and how it changes those it touches. We

label violence in the home as "domestic," as if it were somehow tamer than the real thing (Jones, 1994), but daily the media list casualties. They report that such violence runs rampant, as uncontrolled as an epidemic. People who go through it as victims or as witnesses learn (among many things) to fear violence, to avoid violence at all costs, or to be violent. Many veterans of violence in their families suffer recurrent, paralyzing flashbacks, some slide into alcoholism, drug addiction, assault, suicide, while others find that memory heals itself, blotting out the worst of violence, so that they can go on with life. But as Jones (1994) puts it, "Survivors may develop a determination to stop violence, and they may work toward that goal. But even then they may never quite cheer up" (p. 1).

If our culture embraces the notion that women and children have an absolute right to live free from bodily harm, then it is fundamental to name the nature of violence to know what women understand is needed to feel safe. Although there is debate on the subject, in the 1994 United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, defined violence against women as

> ...any act of gender - based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty whether occurring in public or private life.
>
> (United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, p. 6.)

The Declaration describes the persistence of violence against women as:
...a manifestation of historically unequal power relation between men

> and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and which have prevented women's full advancement. Violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared to men.
>
> (United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, p. 6)

The implications of this definition is that violence against women is socially structured. While it is recognized the extent to which violence against women is the outcome of inequality, the Canadian Panel of Violence Against Women: Final Report (1993) also states that individual acts of violence against women are individually willed.

> A man who exhibits violence verbally, psychologically, physically, sexually, or financially toward his partner is not losing self-control; on the contrary, he is affirming his power, which he wants to preserve at all costs and which makes him neither monstrous or sick. If he abused his wife, it is because he has the privilege and the means to do so.
>
> (p. 6, 1993)

The Report also states that all men, whether or not they are violent, derive benefit from its institutionalization. The threat of violence also keeps women in unwanted relationships with men, defines the social situations and locations that women frequent, restricts women's activities in the workplace and undermines their potential for self-expression and self-confidence. All women pay the price of male violence: while not every woman has directly experienced violence, there are few who do not fear it and whose lives are in some way restricted by its pervasive presence in our society. Can a woman ever feel safe? It is women with these kinds of experiences that will inform the subject

of this study.

Most analyses of violence against women divide violence into five dimensions: physical, sexual, psychological, financial and spiritual. To quote the Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women, they have described these dimensions accordingly:

> Physical violence, the most obvious, can range from pushing and shoving, to hitting, beating, torture and murder. Sexual violence - i.e., any form of non-consensual sexual activity ranging from unwanted sexual touching to rape - must be clearly distinguished from intimate sexual contact which is mutual and consensual in nature. Because sexual violence often takes place within socially sanctioned relationships - marriage, dating, live-in partnerships as well as familial, parental and work relationships - its identification and disclosure are more difficult.
>
> Psychological violence encompasses various tactics to undermine a woman's self-confidence, such as taunts, jeers, insults, abusive language, threats of physical violence or isolation. The deliberate withholding of various forms of emotional support may also be used.
>
> ....financial violence...deny women access to employment opportunities outside of the home or to other avenues for gaining some financial independence, such as part-time work or taking care of children in their own homes. Men may withhold or maintain control over all or substantial amounts of money. Women are sometimes cheated out of their inheritance, employment or other income...denying women access to financial records and knowledge about investments, income or debt. Senior women are often the victims of financial abuse.
>
> Spiritual abuse erodes or destroys an individual's cultural or religious beliefs through ridicule or punishment.
> ...the reality is that in many instances the violence women suffer entails a combination of all these dimensions.
>
> (p. 7)

Definitions have become more specific over the last decade or so. In earlier work, Straus (1977) defined violence as an act carried out with the intent or which is perceived as being with the intent, of injuring another person. The injury may be of many kinds, including psychological, material deprivation or physical injury. Hoteling (1980) clarified that high intensity, offensive and pain producing actions are usually taken for granted as signs of aggression or violence, but, adds that human aggression need not take the form of overt physical damage. In this definition, it is assumed that aggression can be manifest in verbal, indirect and subtle forms of psychological harm and that much human aggression is of this type. These last definitions, although understandable, do not underscore the breadth and depth of brutality that women endure as part of their ordinary lives.

In defining the dimensions of violence that women experience, there is a danger that we will apply the hierarchical organizing principle, or think of the experience of abuse in a linear way. But women's experience of abuse is multidimensional - all abuse is serious, it's impact does not lie on a continuum from most to least serious. There is no hierarchy to the experience or the impact of violence in a woman's life. It is the appreciation of the multidimensional nature of women's experience that contextualizes this study of women who have survived the many faces of violence, and can describe their constructs about safety.

Toward Safety as a Construct

The examination of the definitions of violence constructed by both social bodies and social scientists inform this study. The construction of learning and knowing that emphasizes the abstract processes in all experiences is fundamental to the conceptual perspective of this study. The examination of women's constructs of safety is rooted in the assumption that the world is not a fixed reality, but a world with individual constructions that are constantly changing. Constructivism, as a perspective, refers to the family of theories about mind and mental activity that emphasize the active and proactive nature of all perception, learning, and knowing. This perspective acknowledges the structural and functional primacy of abstract (tacit) over explicit (concrete) processes in our experiences of awareness and wisdom. Constructivism views learning, knowing, and memory as phenomena that reflect the ongoing attempts of mind and body to organize (and reorganize) their own patterns of action and experience. It is understood that patterns are related to the changing and temporally anchored connections that we make with the "world" (Mahoney, 1991). The Latin root of the term constructivism means "to analyze" or "to interpret," with emphasis on a person's active "constructing" of a particular meaning or significance. Mahoney (1991) summarizes the use of constructivism in the social sciences to have two different meanings. One meaning characterizes the organism as an active agent in its ongoing development. The other meaning is used to highlight the social contexts that

construct and orient our efforts at knowing, communicating, and becoming. It is the adoption of this point of view, that guides the purpose and method of this study. The approach is one which tries to respect the complex reciprocity between individuals and their social context in the exploration of the meaning of safety as constructed by women who have survived abuse from an intimate partner. A review of psychological literature about the construct of safety leads to a minimal explanation of such by women who have survived violence. Yet it is assumed or understood that freedom from harm or risk is a fundamental requirement of human survival.

A review of current writings about the lives of women suggests that there are various perspectives around the construct of safety. Carolyn Heilbrun (1988) in writing of women's lives suggests that:

> Safety and closure, which have always been held out to women as the ideals of female destiny, are not places of adventure, or experience, or life. Safety and closure (and enclosure) are, rather, the mirror of the Lady of Shalott. They forbid life to be experienced directly.
>
> (p. 20)

Valverde (1985) in her exploration of many traditional notions of female sexuality, discusses the point that many feminists and women at large: ". . . have come to feel that sexual liberation is not possible or even desirable for women under the present system, and that the best we can hope for is the relative safety of a private committed relationship" (p. 14).

Bell hooks (1984) argues that to create safety from male violence against women in the family we must understand that, although this violence is an expression of male domination:

> . . . I believe that violence is inextricably linked to all acts of violence in this society that occur between the powerful and the powerless, the dominant and the dominated....the notion of the hierarchical rule and coercive authority that is the root cause of violence against women, of adult violence against children, of all violence between those who dominate and those who are dominated....We must see both men and women in this society as groups who support the use of violence if we are to eliminate it.
>
> (p. 118)

Hooks' analysis is a call to action for all men and women, a view that means moving beyond building shelters, to a broad demand for mutual social action whereby much of this work has to be done by men who are not violent, who have rejected the values of capitalist patriarchy. She further argues that male violence is glamorized, made entertaining and sexually titillating, violence is affirmed and rewarded and thus male acts of violence are in the interest of protection, are seen as gestures of care, of his "love" for women and his concern for humanity. hooks' (1984) perspective is that "Love and violence have become so intertwined in this society that many people, especially women, fear that eliminating violence will lead to the loss of love" (p. 123-124).

Writings from the Stone Center (Jordan, Kaplan, Baker Miller, Striver & Surrey, 1991) explore women's meanings on many issues and Baker Miller's (1991) chapter on the construction of anger in women who have been

subordinated provides an interesting analysis that offers food for thought in contemplating women's construction of safety.

> Once more, a stark reality is that most women live in relationships based on economic and social dependence, which leads to a realistic basis for fearing their disruption. There is a great risk in disturbing the relationships that provide one's economic sustenance and one's whole psychological place in the world. Simultaneously living in this kind of dependency continually generates anger. All of these tendencies and their complications can lead to a spiraling phenomena. For example, even small degrees of anger feel dangerous to a woman. Therefore she does not express anger.
>
> (p. 184)

This analysis suggests that women may have to construct their notions of safety on a presumption of silence.

The seminal interview work that lead to characterizing women's ways of knowing (Field Belenky, McVicker Clinchy, Rule Goldberger, & Mattuck Tarule, 1986) indicated that a pervasive background theme in women's stories of loss of trust in male authority through sexual abuse, physical abuse, abandonment, and neglect led women to feel their world was unpredictable and fragile, insecure and impermanent. But for such women this crisis of trust in male authority in their daily lives, coupled with some confirmatory experience that they, too, could know something for sure, led them to take steps to change their fate and "walk away from the past." Such women became curious people and, from the moment they turned inward to listen to the "still small voice," found a new and fascinating object of study: the self. These women associated this with a sense of change. The women were "gaining a voice" and a knowledge

base from which they could more safely investigate the world. ". . . they began to actively analyze their past and current interactions with others" (Field Belenky, et al., 1986, p. 86). They were no longer silent, they were sharing and re-constructing what was safe for them. The desire of this researcher to explore the constructions of safety has been deepened by the findings of the project through the words of these women.

Safety as a Metaconstruct

Most womens' experiences in emergency shelters are said to be positive and the critical need for safety has been reported, but what the nature of that experience is for women prior to and during her stay in a shelter has not been explored. I suspect that once women find ways to exchange their stories, where they read and talk collectively of ambitions, of possibilities, of accomplishments then the story of women's safety may be better understood and such constructs will lead to actions that ensure that women are less vulnerable to the violence of our culture. Heilbrun (1988) articulates the view that there will be ". . . narratives of female lives only when women no longer live their lives isolated in the houses and the stories of men"" (p. 47). Such a construct of safety may then become a way of life. At a deeper level safety is no longer about being in a safe place but becomes a question about being human and understanding self as mediated by safety in relation to the world. Safety then becomes a way of seeing the world, a way of revealing the world. Understanding safety as a metaconstruct suggests a way of being-in-the-world, suggests that the world

and all things in it are measured in terms of safety. It is the enticement of this conceptual perspective that contributes to the rational for the present study.

The Latin root of the word safe means "whole, healthy", and safety means "freedom from danger or risk" and "freedom from injury" (Funk & Wagnalls, 1980). It is worth remembering that Virginia Wolf said, we have to develop "the habit of freedom."

In exploring the psychotherapeutic literature on safety, some associated psychological, "healing" constructs and processes have developed in the work of therapists over the last decade (Laidlow, Malmo, & Assoc. 1990). Counselors have paid attention to the concept of a "safe place." For example, in a therapist's use of hypnosis with survivors of sexual abuse, efforts are made to help the client access and develop the resources needed to deal with guilt on her own. This is done by asking the client to create a safe place, by imagining a container, which can hold difficult feelings and memories, and a guide who acts as a hidden friend. Lépine (1990) through the voice of her client, eloquently describes the importance of a safe place "where we can explore our frightening feelings, and face our dark memories, in a place where there is no judgment, no right or wrong" (p. 279). Therapists define the purpose of this safe place as a construct that gives the client respite from feelings and memories so that she does not become overwhelmed. The purpose of the guide is to create an internal resource that the client can readily access for support. Ellis (1990) describes the importance of imagining safety

in her therapeutic work with women who have experienced abuse. She explains that she begins the healing work by assuming that the woman has no safety and asks that she create a safe place in her imagination. The therapist, then persists, relying on various techniques, until the woman reports that she can imagine a safe place where no one can enter without her permission.

The constructs highlighted in this introduction illustrate the context from which the study wishes to take into account while listening to the women tell their stories. As it is the purpose, scope and interest of this study to interview individual women who have survived violence from their intimate partners, the social conditions, institutions, actions and interactions serve to characterize the culturally prescribed, socially transmitted patterns of belief and conduct relevant to a woman in our community. It is out of this understanding that the researcher seeks to explore perceptions and interpretations of safety. To understand the constructed meaning of safe, to share the essence of the phenomenon, we first attempt to understand its lived meaning as reflected in the stories of the women.

Rationale and Method

To reflect on the meaning of "safe" for women who have been abused, to think of safe as a way of being-in-the-world requires stepping away from conventional, empirical ways of thinking by recognizing that reality is constructed, not given; by recognizing that our seeing and understanding of the world is always seeing as, rather than a seeing as is; and by taking an ethical

and moral responsibility to the personal and collective consequences of the way we see and act in everyday life. This qualitative research approach chosen for this study is a move toward newer and more empowering ways of doing research, to free the subjects of research and myself from entrenched ways of thinking and to free up our power, creativity, sensitivity and search for change. Rothe (1993) suggests that this approach represents imagination in that the work symbolizes active construction of our world. The study is further influenced by an action, feminist values orientation as a response to the growing awareness that, the battered women's movement help some women and children not only to leave but to disappear - out of the sight of batterers who threaten further to abuse and to kill them - it is no longer enough to offer some victimized women safety and sympathy. The battering continues. It seems necessary to think differently and act more effectively to safeguard women and their children. Jones (1994) suggests that, at this time in our history, we have "settled into a habit of neglect."

In an effort to attend to the experience of women who have been abused, the method of choice is a collaborative exercise between myself and the women researched. This approach acknowledges that it is impossible to set aside my own point of view, and recognizes that declaring my beliefs up front in order to guard against bias, allows an analysis of how women interpret feeling safe having lived with violence from an intimate partner. This form of feminist research uses a participant-guided interview with women about their lived

experiences. The guiding assumption is that meaning comes from life stories expressed by women in their own way, without the use of rigid questioning which may be confusing or inhibiting. The inquiry begins with experience. To gather maximum information and to build trust, a multiple in-depth interviewing process is used, interview transcripts are shared with the interviewee, and the interviewee is invited to participate in analysis and interpretation. The returning of transcripts to the women is an attempt to ensure that the women are able to exert control over my interpretations, and is an effort to provide more accurate and sensitive descriptions of feelings, emotions, thoughts and processes as they unfold. Therefore this study is a phenomenological investigation of lived-experience.

Scope, Purpose and Significance

This study focuses on the experience of the woman who has lived with an abusive intimate partner in the past. There are several assumptions in choosing to study with such women. It was assumed that women who had passed the immediate crisis of leaving a violent relationship and were living in a safe place were more likely to have the time, interest and emotional resources to consider participating in the research. Additionally, meeting with women who were still in a violent relationship might create further risk that would be unethical, so they were not approached. It was also assumed that the women who chose to participate were volunteering because they had a desire to explore and share the meaning of "safe" and were sensitive to

increasing their awareness of this phenomenon.

It is the intention of phenomenology to describe phenomenon and to discern essences. Phenomenology reflects the assumption that we live in a given and ordered world. Our everyday world is a social reality comprised of cultural objects and social institutions, a world that we accept without question because we are born into it as it exists. Hence, the very commonplace, common-sense, taken-for-granted features of the world in which we pass our everyday lives are the subject of research. Morris (1977) describes phenomenologists as those who focus on how we internalize the objective world into consciousness, how we negotiate its reality in order to make it livable and shareable, or how we construct social reality within the confines of the world's constraints. To do so researchers must put aside their own biases and beliefs and try to grasp what a phenomenon means for the individuals they study. Only then can they ask what that phenomenon means for society in general. The phenomenologist's concern is to uncover the meaningful history of the individual's world. Researchers using phenomenological approach recognize that people's consciousness is always a consciousness "of" something. They have reasons for acting as they do. "In - order - to" and "because - of" motives are featured as the content of meaning. However, this study does not presuppose the possibility that a phenomenological investigation is able to reveal an unchanging essence of a particular experience through a system of phenomenological reduction (Husserl

explained in Merleau - Ponty, 1962). What something is, is what it is in time (Heidegger, 1962). Although there may be a reality that transcends consciousness, the world for an individual is the world she perceives. The rationale for beginning with the "things themselves" is to begin with that which is familiar (the immediate experience) and to question what it is that makes that experience possible - in effect, to reveal the underlying structure from which that experience can be experienced.

This phenomenological strategy presupposes a hermeneutic context of interpretation (Rothe, 1993), for both researcher and co-researcher. Hermeneutics is a method of interpretation, first of text, and secondly a method that presupposes that experience (knowledge) is contextual, it reflects situational, cultural, social, psychological and historical affairs. Because researchers are like everyone else in that they share the same everyday world, engage in similar common-sense thinking, and use the same language when they are at home, reality is not considered objective. It is lived. To capture its "lived-ness," we research it from a subjective perspective. Once we enter the world of other women we are part of a world that includes biases, values and prejudices. It is the researcher's responsibility to mediate between the familiar and strange in order to achieve meaning. Rather than prediction, the emphasis is on understanding and description. It presupposes that experience always arises from a particular orientation to the experience and interpretation leads to further orientations and a deeper and richer

understanding of the phenomenon (Palmer, 1969).

To provide a phenomenological description of experience may help others to better understand the meanings attached to safety, and in particular, safety for women who experience the abuse of an intimate partner. It may reveal in some way what it is that presupposes the very existence of male violence towards women. But human science research does not stop there, otherwise it loses sight of desire for action. This research is an attempt to act upon the meanings of the experience by providing an analysis of the constructions of safety. As well, this study is personal and is an endeavor to express an interest in being responsive to the motive that initiated this research - the motive to be more powerful and effective in co-constructing safety for women informed by a deeper understanding of the phenomenon in question.

Order of Presentation

Chapter Two aims to illuminate the hermeneutic context of safety for women. It is an attempt to provide a cultural and social interactional setting for the violent experiences that women face. Various interpretations of safety and surviving abuse emerge from this context. They help establish a frame of reference within which a phenomenological question is formulated. Due to the pervasiveness of violence and the extensiveness of the literature, this chapter introduces the following themes by outlining the assumptions and actions taken to address safety for women in a violent culture. Included is an analysis of the literature that characterizes the theoretical framework of our social

institutions and the formal social support of shelters and therapeutic intervention services, the institutionalized social actions taken to protect, the social changes in attitudes and practices that have attempted to address women's safety, and, finally, a presentation of one method of searching for meaning through description and interpretation of the personal experience of safety as a phenomenon - social science research conducted in a phenomenological vein. In summary, a review that struggles to appreciate the dilemmas faced in attempting to generate knowledge about safety as a meaningful construct.

Chapter Three further addresses the general philosophical orientation of qualitative research approaches and the orientation of phenomenology and establishes its relationship to method. The chapter outlines the procedures used to select and interview participants in the study. It also provides a description of data analysis procedures and ethical considerations.

Chapter Four provides a more detailed description of the analysis of the data. Each women is introduced by a brief biographical description.

Chapter Five presents each participant's data in some detail to illustrate the successive ordering of themes. The chapter concludes with a presentation of the final order themes that rose up as personal interpretations by the researcher.

Chapter Six is the focal point of this study. This chapter is a narrative presentation of the interpreted data. It is intended to provide the reader with a

vicarious experience of what it took for three woman to come to a sense of safety in her day-to-day life. Essentially it is to be considered a presentation of the results.

Chapter Seven fulfills the obligations of the researcher to act on the findings. It is the appropriation of the researcher's understanding of the meanings evident in the selected literature and the data. As well, it will address the concepts of validity and reliability of the research findings.

The APPENDICES include the letter of introduction and the participant release form.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The investigation by social scientists, social activists, philosophers, helping professionals, educators, and politicians of the violence against women has produced a vast literature. Novelists, poets, musicians, playwrites and visual artists have also created bodies of work that evoke many interpretations about the meaning of violence against women in our world. The topic is explored in every home, in every relationship either consciously or unconsciously. There have been numerous attempts to make psychological, sociological, personal and pedagogical sense of the implications that surround both the prevalence and the pervasiveness of violence towards women. Those attempts see it and see through it. This review provides an interpretive context from which to examine the violent experience and the actions taken to give meaning to the notion of safety for women who have been abused.

The Construct of Safety for Women in a Violent Culture

It is recognized that a qualitative study of an everyday life experience such as safety presents challenges. Procedures for organizing images are ill-defined and rely on processes of inference, insight, logic and luck. The laboratory of everyday life cannot be contained, started, stopped, manipulated or erased. Variables are not controlled, and until qualitative researchers near the end of the study, they may not be able to even determine what those

variable are. Thus, theoretical development, description, and operationalization are the more likely outcome of the research process, as opposed to providing the means or tools for conducting the study. Science begins with observations. Observations provide a footing for the theoretical foundation and determine the conceptual parameters. It is on this foundation that more clearly defined quantitative methods test and refine a growing body of knowledge.

The foundation of knowledge relevant to understanding safety for women and developed from the experience of women who have been violated, is limited. Most applications of concepts and theories have been borrowed from other disciplines. There is now an urgent need to reexamine this acquired theoretical base and to develop concepts and theories relevant to women's reality. Until efforts address this need, there will be a poor fit between the social scientists, the activists, professional helpers, and educators actual knowledge base and the woman's reality. However, working outside of the mainstream of scientific method poses challenges and risks by investigating ambiguous, difficult problems. The contribution cannot be predicted.

Some of the issues around this topic of safety have been previously addressed in the writings of psychological, legal, and sociological thinkers. The topic has often been approached indirectly, or has been addressed in other fields, in other contexts. The special problems of examining such an everyday concept have largely been neglected. Judging the "soundness" of this study is based on the acceptability of the qualitative approach. The certainty of

the qualitative results is a challenge to any such inquiry. The question of certainty permeates this research process - is safety a construct, a concept worthy of examination? Some would argue that what we study is limited by our tools or methods, and some would argue that what we study is limited by our perception, for perception limits what we see as a research problem. Appreciating the nature of the chosen approach to the study, an examination of the topic of safety for women in a violent culture was undertaken.

The intention of this literature review was to choose work that would allow a reflection of the issues of safety for women in our violent culture. Indeed, the analysis of the literature led to the qualitative perspective taken in determining a research question and method of inquiry. The choice of the research question the consideration of what "legitimate data" contributed to a focus and rationale for the constructs, the quantity of "data" (literature) collected and the level of abstraction of the chosen literature, have all provide a context from which to build the inquiry.

Safety Constructed By-Laws

Our right to freedom from bodily harm underlies our laws against physical assault, providing their moral foundation. Without laws to forbid assault and battery, rape and homicide, and without a government to uphold those laws and punish the offenders, we would have to defend ourselves. Such lawlessness would be terrible. Yet justice for women in Canada has always been elusive. It was men who sat at the table writing the laws and

administering them, protecting their interests in property and safety in the process (Final Report, Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women, 1993). As the Panel reports this exclusion of women from the formulation, administration, application and interpretation of the law has diminished women's access to justice and resulted in their being harmed rather than helped by much of their contact with the system.

Jones (1994) has documented recent outstanding American cases of women who have suffered because the law drew a curtain of privacy about each man's household to shield it from legal scrutiny. In her book, Next Time She'll Be Dead, Jones (1994) begins by reviewing the historical context of the law between public matters and private family matters, leaving the family under the governance of the husband and the father. English common law made a Husband and A Wife legally one entity, and that one was the Husband. When she married, a women ceased to exist before the law; she was "covered" by her Husband. If Wife ran up debts, beat up a neighbor, or stole a horse, Husband had to answer for it at the bar of justice. Obviously, then the law had to arm the Husband with a "stick" to keep the Wife in line. Today, of course, the women is legally responsible for her own action; so there is no longer any basis for the legal justification of wife beating. But as Jones documents, the struggle to restrict the "right" of men to "chastise" their wives and children, few provided any punishments for men who exceeded the limits. She explains that although laws against assault were on the books in every state, they were intended to

regulate the conduct of one man to another, they were almost never applied when a man assaulted his wife. Thus, many men continued to claim their ancient privilege, and law enforcement officers, uncertain what the laws required of them - as one man to another - understandably reluctant to interfere in a fellow's "family" affairs, hesitated to look behind the traditional curtain of privacy.

As in America, the Canadian legal system evolved a series of safeguards incorporated to try to balance power between the accused and the state. Canadian safeguards have become known as the fair trial rights of the accused. There was no obligation to consider the impact of these provisions or any other aspects of legal practice on the victims of the crime until the introduction in 1985 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* equality section which supports the right to equal benefit and protection of the law for all victims as well as the accused. But, as the Final Report Canadian Panel of Violence Against Women (1993) states, even with these obligations in place, little has been done to bring a fair balance to the system. The Report documents hundreds of stories of women who were failed by a legal system that did not believe their accusations of assault, would not interfere with the rights of the husband and father in his own home, or trivialized the consequences for serious acts of violence. The limited criminalization of the violence committed against women is inherently a great violation of their basic human rights to equal benefit and protection of the law, to security of the person

and sometimes to life. Denial of the existence of violence is reinforced when acquittals result because of a technicality due to the process and not related to the guilt or innocence of the accused or when the trivial sentences deny the seriousness of the crime, or when crimes are inadequately defined or ignored in law. Accordingly, the Report (1993) still calls for considerable systemic change in the legal system.

The criminal justice system has taken some positive steps to respond to abused women. In 1982, the Solicitor General of Canada issued a policy directive that the police must lay charges in all cases of wife abuse where reasonable and possible grounds exist. Jaffe, Wolfe, Telford, and Austin (1986) report evidence of success in London, Ontario, where the implementation of police guidelines resulted in dramatic increases in the number of charges laid, an increased feeling of support from police by victims, and a decrease in recidivism. However, these findings cannot be generalized to other communities where there are no clear procedures and where the police often choose not to lay charges, suggesting rather that the woman lay them herself. When women do not, the response is often "victim blaming" (Burris & Jaffe, 1984).

A pilot project in Minnesota (Sherman & Berk, 1984) found that immediate arrest of the batterer, with a minimum of 24 hours' incarceration, reduced subsequent violence in these men by 50%. In support of this social exchange view, Erez (1986) reviewed all "domestic incident" reports filed with a

United States county prosecutor's office for one year, a total of 3021 reports. Across all female-male intimate relationships, the frequency of arrest of the assaultive party did not exceed 13%. Police intervention with "domestic violence" in all communities has been deficient, and police responses to the violated woman frequently increases the woman's distress (Wyatt, Notgrass, & Newcomb, 1990). Such results tend to support the social exchange theory of cost-benefit analysis, predicting that a balance of reward and punishment will encourage the behavior to continue. It would seem that, as long as the rewards of power and control outweigh the costs of perpetrating abuse, violence against women will not diminish.

Some changes, such as the judicial education programs on gender equality and medical training about wife abuse are being introduced but it appears limited and the results of such work as that undertaken by the Canadian Panel of Violence Against Women (1993) report an urgency to act more quickly.

Safety Constructed by Addressing Attitudes: Policy and Public Education

With the spread of public knowledge and outrage, some women's groups and policy makers have become concerned that not enough is being done to address the life-threatening violence suffered by many abused women. The need for long-term prevention and a community-based perspective to support the long-term empowerment of women in all aspects of their lives was

recognized as important by these individuals and groups, but was considered to be of lower priority than addressing the life/death crises which many women face. However, some positive changes have resulted from greater public and private attention to woman abuse. A broader range of people have become involved. Health care workers, primarily in hospitals, began to create crisis teams, primarily for survivors of sexual assault. Social workers in counseling and income support organizations became more aware of their potential roles in helping women who had been abused. Police, in particular, began to play a much more central role.

As mentioned, in 1982, the federal Solicitor General wrote to all Chiefs of Police across Canada, urging them to direct their officers to lay charges in cases of wife battering when they had reasonable and probable grounds to believe that an assault had taken place. In 1983, broad amendments made to Canadian sexual assault legislation included an amendment making sexual assault in marriage a crime. Some provinces began to launch public education campaigns focusing on slogans such as "Wife assault .... it is a crime" (MacLeod, 1994).

Various studies have examined the practices and growing knowledge of communities in trying to address "domestic violence." Dolon, Hendricks, and Meagher (1986) studied the police practices in cases of domestic violence and the attitudes of police officers in three municipal police departments in the midwestern United States. One hundred and twenty-five police officers ranked

factors influencing their decisions to make arrests, and commented on the amount of training they and fellow officers had received. Officers considered domestic violence as problematic and threatening to their own safety. Use of violence against police was the major factor influencing them toward arrest. Criminal justice or social service agencies were not considered effective. Most police officers believed that training was not adequate, and the researchers named more effective training as the top priority for dealing with domestic violence. A Canadian study by Home (1992) compared 188 social workers' and 235 police officers' intervention decisions in response to "domestic violence." She found that social workers referred women more often than did police to shelters, social services and legal aid as well as taking more action to ensure their safety. Presence of physical violence and child abuse led to their making more referrals to family counselling as did absence of alcohol. Police took more decisive action when physical violence was part of the scenario than when it was absent.

Another prevention perspective aims to promote women's safety and health, through efforts to offer programs that reach high-risk women. One such example is reported by McFarlane (1989). Having described the etiology of battering of women and the prevalence of battering during pregnancy, and the pregnancy outcomes of battered women, she presents a community-wide primary prevention program that has linked the health care provider with law enforcement and shelters for battered women to interrupt the cycle of violence

and promote the health and safety of pregnant women.

MacLeod (1994) suggested that Canada has become a world leader in criminalizing wife assault because of the aggressive charging policies adopted by some police forces across the country. She interprets that this emphasis on the criminal nature of wife assault, on short-term protection and on swift and definitive action provide an important symbolic statement of our society's abhorrence of these acts. We can act in the face of the crises.

Given the change that our society has experienced in attitudes and responses to violence against women, the challenges of defining prevention and of creating approaches to accomplish the prevention of violence have been limited by other ensuing difficulties. The emphasis on the crisis, and the complementary earmarking of funds for programs responding to the immediate needs of safety and emergency health care, means that funding and energy of front-line workers, for follow-up, support programs, analysis and advocacy become a luxury that can not be justified in light of the very real physical danger women face, and in light of limitations on available financial and human resources.

Such forces tend to erode innovative thinking about long-term prevention, because these priorities may be seen as too ideal and cannot really be addressed until the life/death crises women are experiencing can be dealt with effectively. Prevention then, most often, comes to mean the production of a pamphlet, some education of professionals or community workers about the

prevalence of abuse of women, the "cycle of violence" and the circumstances of women who are being abused. Certainly, the crises orientation has merit and has increased public awareness. However, analyses of the problems that involve the women survivors of abuse in the conversation, that attempts to solve women's economic, employment, housing, social, health, child-care, and counseling needs tend to get lost along the way. Furthermore, ignoring the hierarchies that tend to disempower women and men who are not in power, and attitudes that devalue women and girls, encourage inequality and violence. One innovative example of an attempt to change values and attitudes that institutionalize the power of men over women was started in 1986 by the Lincoln Public School Board of Education in Ontario, with the implementation of a kindergarten to grade 12 curriculum in *Personal Safety: We Care.* The goal is to provide students with age-appropriate knowledge and skills, and attitudes to enable them to respond to the problems posed by child abuse, wife abuse, and sexual abuse (Baines, Evans, & Neysmith, 1991). The program includes a program of in-service training for school staff, orientation sessions for parents, and a series of pamphlets for students and their parents to be used at home. Initial evaluations have been positive. Will it be possible for such educational programs to create and sustain practical approaches to ensure greater safety in our communities and in our homes?

Safety Constructed by Shelters

The emphasis on crisis intervention has contributed to the growth of shelters across Canada. The earlier efforts of front-line feminist women's centers and consciousness-raising groups of the 1970s that created the first transition houses or crisis shelters for women and their children, grew from a community - building and holistic, problem-solving ideology of empowerment, whereby women would help other women build a life free from violence. Such efforts considered their needs for safety and justice, but also their needs for work, for child care, for health care, and for a decent income (Hoff, 1990; MacLeod, 1994).

But, as stated earlier, there became more concern for the life/death crises which many women face. Increased public awareness, and the ensuing political response of policy makers to focus on crises, has led to government support for shelters, with a rapid growth in transition houses in the early 1980s. In the years between 1978 and 1986, the number of transition houses across this country grew from 78 to approximately 400, about the same number that exists today (MacLeod, 1994). Government funding has continued, if not always adequately, in terms of the needs and goals of the transition houses.

To illustrate locally, in 1974 the Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter was charged with a mission to assist women in crisis and to work towards community change in addressing the issues of violence against women. Over the last twenty years, the Shelter served an estimated 60,000 women and

children by providing crisis counselling, information and residential services. The demand continues. In this past year, an increase of 10% in the number of callers was evident with the total number of calls increasing to 4,139 from 3,775 in 1994. (CWES Newsletter, 1994). Residentially, 426 women and 561 children were served in 1993-94. The number of women and children turned away increased to 1,989 from 1,893 the previous year. Expansion of funds allowed for additional staff in the Outreach program and as a result, 200 women and 320 children were served compared with the 1992-93 figures of 65 women and 118 children. A federal government grant also allowed for significant program expansion in the Men's Crisis service over the past year, and as a result of extending the service to women and their partners, 195 women and 136 men made use of the service.

However, the provincial reality is that funding cuts are becoming more prevalent and shelters are required to take steps to ensure the continuation of the core services. Prevention and education programs (such as those for adolescents, probation officers, partners of women who have been abused, and programs to train volunteers) are at great risk.

A number of studies have emerged to examine the environmental and program nature of shelters in various countries. Several studies by Rufueroso and Verderber (1989, 1990) surveyed 51 residents and 50 shelter staff in two shelters as to preferences of shelter sites, buildings, and location. Data supported the hypothesis that a residential image affording anonymity and

safety was preferred and would be of paramount concern for both residents and staff. Site-location aspects associated with satisfaction included the quality of outdoor play areas and the sense of safety in the immediate neighborhood. It is notable that research like this takes a narrow framework from which to explore what women who have been battered are asked to consider regarding safety, given what is known about the material and social conditions of such womens' lives.

Jones (1994) in a review of the shelter network in America, claimed that federal and state funding for battered women's shelters and related services is pitifully short-lived and small. She reports that one result of these initiatives is that there are only about one thousand shelters for battered women in the United States. Everywhere, women in need are turned away. In Philadelphia, Women Against Abuse rejects 75 percent of the women who seek shelter. In New York City, Sanctuary for Families turns away one hundred battered women and their children every week. In Seattle, five hundred men are arrested for battering every month, but only thirty-nine shelter beds are available for women. In all areas of the country, demand for temporary shelter, court advocacy, and peer support groups is rising, and budgets are being cut (Jones, 1994). As an activist and journalist, Jones points out that shelters were never meant to become permanent establishments, but because community institutions do not act effectively to defend women, shelters are the single most effective way of saving lives. She argues that more shelters must be established, and all of

them should be staffed primarily by women who are survivors of abuse, whether or not they have professional credentials. Additionally, as so many battered women cite the lack of affordable housing as the single greatest obstacle to getting free of an abusive man, shelters must have additional funding and cooperation from municipal authorities to help women find transitional and long-term housing.

Any proposed solution to wife abuse envisions safeguards that go beyond emergency sheltering services to women who have been abused. Providing adequate funding to programs directed at second-stage housing and affordable, safe social housing community projects are seen as immediate goals to ensure greater safety for women. Coupled with the vision for accessible, adequate housing, is the awareness of the need for public funds directed towards programs for children who have witnessed violence and are seen as high-risk candidates for long term emotional adjustment problems.

Safety Constructed by Language: Naming Violence For What It Is

While the provision of services has had many benefits, and changes in the criminal justice system have clearly asserted the criminal nature of assaults against women within and outside of their homes, other realities limit our society's ability to describe and limit violence against women in long-term and effective way. There is an obvious but underdeveloped bond between discourse analysis and the practice of law. Language and texts are central to

the practice of law, which can be said to consist primarily of discourse. Written judgments, in particular, express the state of the law of the time. Furthermore, they affect not only the participants but also shape the future of law and society as a whole (Wetherell & Potter, 1988). The language used in legal judgments is not only a reflection of individual thought; it is important in and of itself. A particular judge's language may be drawn from counsel, witnesses, previous judgments or broader social discourse. It is not uncommunicated thoughts, attitudes or motivations, it is public discourse. Language affects events and creates versions of reality.

Studies of the legal process as discourse examine how participants in the legal process "fit words to deeds" (Danet, 1980). In 1983, Canada attempted to shift the emphasis of sexual assault law away from a historical definition of rape as a sexual or moral issue to treating it as an assault. However, as Ruebsaat (1985) states the courts have had trouble shifting their focus from morality to violence. Furthermore, as Boyle (1985) states the old terminology used by the judiciary may trivialize the violent nature of sexual assault. There is difficulty in using the term "sexual" as used in the term "sexual assault." Boyle (1985) points out that if sex is stolen rather than willingly shared, then in a world where sex is understood to be a consensual act, stolen sex would not be sex. Yet the law demands that what has be stolen be described as sexual. Even though the judicial system has made efforts to identify wife assault as a serious crime, it continues to fail women by the very

limitations of its stock in trade - words.

Suspecting that the language used in such cases could be one of the problems, Coates, Beavin Bavelas, and Gibson (1994) studied a random sample of recent Western Canadian trial judgments in cases of sexual assault. They argued that in describing the acts involved in sexual assault, particularly when the accused is not a stranger to the victim, the language used to "fit words to deeds" creates their meaning. An analysis of the language used in 12 trial judgments revealed five anomalous themes: erotic/affectionate characterizations of sexual assault; statements about what the complainant should have done, that is, they defined "appropriate resistance;" sexual assault as distinct from violence; the good character of the offender; and grammatically omitting the agent of the assault (the acts were simply there, with no apparent victims or agents). Their data revealed that sexual assault by someone known to the victim does not have a refined language for unwanted penetration or pseudo-sexual contact in familiar surroundings by someone who was trusted. Nor, as they report, do we have a language for violence that does not resemble combat, or a vocabulary for hard-working community members who have none of the characteristics of the jobless, anonymous rapist. In calling for further research in this area, the study recommends that a new vocabulary needs to be developed to describe sexual assault accurately. Perhaps such revealing research will contribute to a public discourse that has an impact on the events of violence, offering a clearer picture of what it means for women to be safe with

intimate partners.

Another important consequence that surrounds the construct of safety for women is the current definitions used by policy makers, government funders, police, hospital workers, social workers, and the media. Increasingly, such agents limit the operational definition of abuse to physical and/or sexual abuse, in accordance with the legal definition of assault and in accordance with the types of abuse that are generally seen as requiring crisis intervention. Media, government, professionals and the public still pay lip service to the devastating effects of emotional abuse, but the impact has not been felt strongly enough for funding to be made available by the government or the private sector to respond to the long-term needs for counseling and support that generally result from abuse.

As services grew, so also did knowledge of the numbers of women who are abused in Canada. Such numbers, often bereft of a language to describe the long-term consequences, may have contributed to the decision to concentrate on the crisis - to offer protection to women, that on the surface looks like it is addressing the most serious concerns. However, it may also be that a growing awareness of the large numbers of women who are abused leads to a sense of helplessness. The idea of long-term programs for so many women seems a formidable, unaffordable, and unattainable goal. As a result, the multifaceted short and long term needs of women for jobs, child care, counseling, practical skills and training are often overlooked, or seen as

less important than dealing with the crisis. As MacLeod, 1994 has stated: "concerns that should be looked at in the ideal world, but concerns that could not be dealt with given current realities and resources" (p. 9).

Ineffective action to provide long-term solutions and the increasing demands on shelter workers to "do it all" while fitting into a medical, social work and legal model of responding, contradicts attempts to provide a holistic response to abuse and violence against women. The language of this crisis work demands that safety can only be assured by meeting the crisis with shelters for the identified "number" who meet the eligibility criteria. Numbers are a more concrete version of reality.

Many writers, including Elias (1986) argue that a crisis intervention approach tends to perpetuate a language that creates an image of the "victim" as a defenseless, weak or weakened person requiring outside protection. The abuser is also generally presented in a one-dimensional way. Such images rarely match the experiences of women who are abused and some women come to see the programs and services available to them as inappropriate or inadequate for their needs. Elias (1986) writes:

> Victim programs have met victim needs and expectations very unevenly. ....Unfortunately, these competing motives or purposes have often outpaced the satisfaction of victim needs and expectations, perhaps so much that they actually impede victim interests... It could represent, in other words, the outward, symbolic politics of victim advocacy, with little substance underneath.
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> (p. 27)

Ineffective action accompanied by a language to describe the nature and extent of violence towards women that whitewashes the meaning and impact of such abuse does little to increase the safety of women and their children. Euphemistic phrases can abstract the meaning of violence and prevent us from seeing violence for what it is and what it means. The safety of women must depend on telling what we know and experience. "Domestic violence" is one of those phrases that appear to be designed to give people a way of talking about a topic without seeing what is really going on. We used to speak of "wife beating" or "wife torture" but the media and the professionals have abstracted these notions to allow for a dispassionate distance, far removed from the horrible spectacle of human beings in pain. Novelists have conjured up the scenes of beatings and the times between beatings and their creations have been more informative than the language of the academic researcher who speaks of "domestic violence," who seem too surprised to acknowledge that those beaten wives are women. Instead such a phrase seems to be reaching for a gender-neutral, objective term that is more in keeping with the principles underpinning scientific "truth." Over the years mental health and justice professionals chose professional vocabularies to describe their work such as: "spouse abuse," "conjugal violence" and "marital aggression," a renaming that has hidden what the grass roots women's movement tried to uncover (Schecter, 1982). Even women advocates in the "battered women's movement" have had to resort to the use of "domestic violence" to improve their fund

raising efforts so as not to offend men (who controlled the charitable money) who might feel that they could be blamed for this "social problem." Jones (1994) points out how this term can obscure the real message. She describes how "many thought it was a bill to combat political terrorism within the United States" when the Domestic Violence Act (to provide money for battered women's services) was first proposed in 1978.

The terms "battered women," "domestic violence victim," and "abused women" emphasize the woman's situation as the victimized object of another person's actions. This also hides her subjectivity and her actions. Such terms suggest that "battered" women is all that she is, and that "victim" is her identity. Unfortunately, as bell hooks (1992) reflects, "everybody loves a woman who is a victim." We choose a language that exploits the story, manipulates emotions by revealing the horror and thus we are entertained and desensitized to the experience. She states that in a culture of domination like ours, if there is nothing in you that is of value, everything of value is outside of you and must be acquired. The cultural message is one of devaluation. Low self-esteem seems to be a national epidemic and victimization is the flip side of domination. As hooks (1992) points out, only by holding on to the sense that we can never be completely dehumanized by "others" can we create a redemptive model. There is no change without contemplation, "I am more than my pain." Her experiences tell her that she "is able to name it, to name that it hurts, to say that I am victimized by it. But I don't want to see that as all that I

am." The message is one that calls for personal agency, each woman coming forward, demanding to be safe of her own free will, not because other people urge her to do so. This identifies an important message that calls for examination in the "data" that will be provided in the study.

Safety Constricted by Other Formal Supports: Counselling Interventions

Even as we generally recognize the physical, sexual, emotional and spiritual violation of at least one-third of the female population we continue to individualize violence, in order to address the "problem." Recognition of the ignored or hidden language that characterizes perceptions of acts of violence, as well as the private and public responses to its influences on women, has increased the personal agency by seeking help to address the impact of abuse and concerns for safety through the guidance of another person, a psychotherapist/counselor. However, as Omer and London (1988) observe, psychotherapy seems to be in a state of theoretical clutter and disorder, with over 460 schools of therapy, many being incompatible, overlapping or conflicting. Hanna (1994) proposes that the problem of conflicting theories of psychotherapy is primarily metaphysical. Consequently, the philosophical nature of the conflicting theories of psychotherapy, becomes a bit clearer when it is recognized as a primarily philosophical problem best suited to philosophical treatment. Buss (1978) points out that each of the major revolutions in psychology - psychoanalytic, humanistic, behavioral and cognitive

- has been but a shift in perspective from the objectivist view of "reality creates person" to the constructivist view of "person creates reality," as the case may be. It is not within the scope of this study to review the entire progress of psychology, but it is useful to recognize that the presuppositions of scientific psychotherapy and personality theory are inextricably bound up with metaphysics - formal, personal theorizing residing in human minds. Conflicting theories compete for popular turf, attention, and conceptual territory. It calls for trained therapists to be intimate with all the major theories. But it must be radicalized to call us back insistently to the unique features of human experience without losing anything in the process.

What has psychological theory and psychotherapy offered women? In Naomi Weissten's essay (1965) on marshaling the factual evidence of how psychology constructs the female, she reminds us that women are characterized in our culture and psychology as inconsistent, emotionally unstable, lacking in a strong superego, weaker, "nurturant" rather than productive, "intuitive" rather than intelligent, and if they are at all "normal," suited to the home and family. In short, the list adds up to a typical minority group stereotype of inferiority. She argues, that until psychologists begin to respect the evidence, until they begin to look at the social context within which people move, until they provide equal respect for men and women, our answers to many questions will simply reflect our prejudices. Therein lies the complexity of the usefulness of psychotherapy and psychological theory in helping woman

who have been abused to construct a safe place to live.

What seems to have often been ignored is that violence itself - and its threat - is the norm. Yet traditional psychiatry and the self-help movement might say otherwise, treating violence by individualizing the woman's problem and holding her responsible (Greenspan, 1993).

Although many statistical accounts paint the picture of the routine physical and sexual violation of women and female children in our society, we have failed to accept that this is a common feature of families. Many violent men are seen as "respectable," men who fit the "normal" profile in the battery of psychological tests that are used to measure normality and pathology. What the tests did not tell us was that the social system itself is pathological. Traditionally, psychology and psychotherapy have reflected a culture that denies the social origins of violence thus misunderstanding and perpetuating women's emotional suffering (Greenspan, 1993; Worell & Remer, 1992). Those who had the power to define reality named the problem.

One of the radical acts of our times: "telling our stories in our own voices and honoring our common experience" (Greenspan, 1993) has broken the isolation and silence. Women, through these acts of consciousness-raising, cracked through the unspoken codes of psychological thinking in two areas: first, the belief that women's problems and dilemmas are strictly personal, having to do with individual flaws and inadequacies; and second, the professional ideal that we must submit ourselves to an expert who knows us

better than we do, to really understand ourselves. New approaches to women in therapy are rooted in and reflect this process of healing called consciousness-raising, contributing to the shift from patriarchal to women-centered ways of re-visioning and transforming self and the world over the last twenty-five years (Bodsky & Hare-Mustin, 1980; Greenspan, 1993; Laidlow, Malmo & Associates, 1990; Worell & Remer, 1992).

To understand women's problem, traditional therapy searches our personal history, but models of women-centered psychotherapy are also grounded in the recognition of women's subordination in patriarchal society; the latter is a psychotherapy that is committed to women's individual social empowerment. This approach is grounded in the belief that the real roots of the problem looks beyond our personal history to our history as women in society and to the history of traditional psychotherapy itself.

The pioneering work of Lenore Walker, a feminist who worked with battered women and wrote the classic book about the "Battered Woman Syndrome" (Walker, 1979), was one of the major contributions that resulted in psychiatry admitting that psychological suffering is inflicted on women as a result of victimization by others, often men intimately know to the victim, and that such suffering is not a manifestation of some inner mental disorder. The invention of the diagnosis of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), is now seen as the domestic equivalent of being a prisoner of war. The loss of self-esteem, intense psychological distress, daytime and nighttime terror, difficulty

in sleeping and concentrating, and "outbursts of anger" can be diagnosed as symptoms that now incorporate women's secrets into the psychiatric diagnosis (DSM -IV, APA, 1994). The diagnosis of PTSD is described in the DSM-IV as a "disorder" that occurs when "the person has experienced, witnessed or was confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others" (p. 427).

What the APA neglected to recognize, even with the 1994 revisions, was that physical and sexual violence is very much *inside* the range of human experience when the humans are female children or adults (Greenspan, 1993). The readily available statistics, daily media accounts of battered and raped women and thousands of women telling their stories (The Final Report of the Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women, 1994), do not seem to count as "scientific" evidence. Diagnoses have always be drawn within specific socioeconomic contexts and are changed within a social context, as is demonstrated within the struggles of the day of such esteemed professional organizations as the American Psychiatric Association. Diagnosis is ultimately a social act with social uses, often hidden as a medical act with medical uses. What causes debate amongst the professional therapeutic community is how people look at reality and understand suffering, especially the suffering of socially induced violence. What have been challenged by feminist psychotherapists (Greenspan, 1993) are the three "myths" perpetuated by orthodox psychoanalytic psychiatrists and psychologists:

• Myth 1. "It's all in your head" - the notion that the psyche can be understood by separating it from the social system in which it takes its shape.

• Myth 2. The medical model of psychopathology that assumes that emotional suffering is essentially a matter of individual illness or disease and can be treated in a medical model of practice.

• Myth 3. The idea that there is an Expert who can cure this suffering through his superior knowledge and power.

Such traditional views of therapy appear to mirror the culture which it reflects, yet are limited in their recognition of the psychopathology of our social system and its destructive effects on individual psyche, body or spirit. Historically, psychiatry and psychology suggested a "cure" that, often unwittingly, contributed to the psychopathology itself.

While rejecting such traditional approaches and borrowing ideas and techniques from the radical therapy and growth movements, feminist therapy came about as a grass-roots effort of women helping women. Such an approach was constructed on a theory of female psychology that differed from the masculine bias of traditional theory. It approached the question of how the "outer" becomes "inner" in women's lives. The theory sought to explore how, not only cultural values and norms, but social structures such as family and the economy, influenced female psychology (Baker Miller, 1976; Greeenspan, 1993; Smith & David, 1975). Since the development of this theoretical orientation, there has been a rapid social change in the condition of women.

The dominant culture has no doubt been influenced by the efforts of the last 25 years. The media image of the "liberated woman" has been incorporated into the way that society thinks about women. At first glance, would appear that some of the more crippling emotional problems are a thing of the past, or at least apply to a small number of women. But the dominant culture has a way of incorporating the ideology of feminism while pacifying its potentially revolutionary content. The contemporary "liberated woman" is a combination of the Total Woman with her man and the beautiful career woman on the job - she is Superwoman. This modified version, often internalized by contemporary young women, does not negate the centuries of female social conditioning. While not minimizing the extraordinary energy devoted to successfully freeing women from the psychological and social ties that bind, nevertheless, feminist therapists continue to treat the female symptoms of oppression that still plague women. Meanwhile, changes in the traditional "cure" that psychiatry offered for these symptoms and conflicts, and shifts in academic and professional realms of psychology and psychotherapy have demonstrated increased tolerance of feminist scholarship, research and teaching.

In concert with feminist therapy, the values of humanist therapy appear more easily adapted to the practice of helping meet the needs of women. The values of empathy, growth, relationship, emotional release, first spoken of by Carl Rogers, (Rogers, 1970) are the qualities that have found a receptive audience among both therapists and female clients suffering from violence

against them. But because the humanist approach to therapy fails to go beyond the relationship between the personal psychic lives of the woman to a clear connection between the private and public, the emotional and social world of woman, therapy can only go so far if it does not take place in a context based on a political understanding of a woman's problems.

Some feminist therapists have adapted the humanist vision of psychology and therapy to include a political understanding, but, with the best of intentions, there appear to be limitations. Friar Williams (1976) defined her form of feminist therapy as not different from other humanist therapy, explaining that the goal is to achieve self-awareness in order to make the most meaningful choices and in order to experience a more fully integrated self. Such a focus advocates for woman to be seen as a whole person, not limited by biology, but free to develop into a successful, self-aware full integrated individual. In practice, the message is often interpreted as experiencing freedom and power through professional careers, male-style careers, achieved by looking inside themselves and changing their self-imposed limitations. The unstated assumptions in such goals for woman, are that "woman's work" in the family, being unpaid and therefore unseen, does not count as work. Only the male-style work in the paid labor force is work, and that only a woman's self-actualized commitment to such work will free her of dependency and determine her economic condition and power in society. As such, therapy, with these goals, only speaks to a privileged few, and only grooms female clients for a

society that does not yet exist. It suggests that if you want to avoid poverty you must re-construct your work orientation and develop a more "serious" work commitment, the way men do. It seems that women are not mentally "healthy" unless they feel and act more like men. The irony of such therapy, traditional or humanist, is that it appears to refuse to abandon the view that our society is predominantly determined by feelings, not by the powerful influences of economy, social structures, and politics.

Given this overview of current thinking in psychotherapy for women who have been abused, it is useful to examine the current feminist practices that therapists are encouraged to follow in offering counseling services to women clients who have suffered from violence and abuse. It is estimated that over half of the women clients who seek counseling have experienced interpersonal violence in a close relationship (Worell & Remer, 1992), but many therapists reveal that women often shield the facts of battering behind other presenting issues. With this assumption in mind, all initial assessments with women clients should include screening for possible violence and abuse. Once the existence of current abuse is revealed, Worell and Remer (1992), typical of most feminist consultants in this field, recommend that intervention focus on ensuring the safety of the woman by exploring the dimensions of her current situation and her responses to her victimization, assisting her in the decision-making process by helping her to consider possible alternatives and likely outcomes, and restructuring her situation and planning for action. They

present a set of practices based on a model of abuse in close relationships that includes societal, situational, and maintaining factors in the initiation and persistence of woman battering.

This three-part model of violence and entrapment is presented within the context of current research on incidence and theories about violence toward women. Critiquing the telephone survey research of Gelles and Straus (1988), who estimated that one is six wives had been struck by their husband and that the average battered wife is attacked three times each year, Worell and Remer (1992) note that at least five problems with the use of the interview scale, and led them to develop a model that did not wish to underestimate the total extent of woman abuse. Noting that these earlier surveys documented only single instances of physical violence, did not include the degree of injury to the victim, omitted multiple forms of violence reported by battered women, failed to assess the many aspects of coercion and intimidation and limited these rates of violence to currently married women, resulted in the construction of a more complete definition of abuse and violence.

In recognition of the limited knowledge of premarital abuse, the extent of abuse and violence toward woman from diverse socioeconomic, age or ethnic groups coupled with the lack of survey research on the most violent form of abuse - murder, this model by Worrel and Remer argues for routine screening for abuse with **all** female clients. It is assumed that the therapist who sees a battered woman must consider that her life is always in danger, whether she is

at home with her abuser, or has followed through with her decision to leave. Intentionality to harm, controlling behaviors, as well as injury are considered important to the definition. Hence the model conceptualizes the abusive process in three parts; the structural factors of society, the violence-prone abuser and the victim as a hostage or prisoner within her own life space, hypothesizing a relationship among the three variables. Not only does this model assume a direct influence of one factor on another, but signifies a feedback loop in which the consequences of the societal and abuse factors provide reinforcement and repetition of the violence and oppression. Such a model predicts a continuation of violence to women if such factors are not drawn out as part of the intervention process.

For therapists working from this model, the issue of safety is considered one of three paramount goals when violence is present, and crisis intervention procedures are recommended to increase the woman's safety. It is recommended that the therapist provide the woman with data on the frequency of child abuse by battering men, outline the reality of the injuries sustained, and debunk the myth that battered men are unable to control their violence since they exhibit violent behavior only under certain circumstances and toward women and children, not more powerful others. As part of the therapist's safety plan created with the woman, assessment of suicide/homicide risk is also recommended, and written contracts are negotiated between the therapist and the woman, in which there is agreement not to inflict lethal harm on either

herself or her abuser. Plans for escape should the abuse reoccur are also detailed. Dealing with the next violent incident include knowing how to reach a shelter hotline, evaluating the possibility of contacting supportive family or friends, calling the police, visiting the hospital to document injury and swearing out a warrant for the arrest of the abuser. Exploration of separation from the abuser, the possibility of joining a spouse abuse survivor support group, the value of less traditional family therapy counseling, the need for restraining orders, examination of child care and housing resources and cognitive-behavioral strategies to enhance self-esteem and self-efficacy are all recommended as actions and decisions to consider.

Each "therapeutic" step toward increasing safety is an offer to take informed action based on accumulated knowledge and experience. Knowledge is gained through believing the pain and suffering of women who have broken the silence about violence. Experience is accrued in appreciating the necessity of a provision of services and just legal avenues that might empower a woman to achieve some measure of safety in her lifespace. What is still at stake is the sustained quality of the support that is needed to affirm each woman to take individual action to increase her safety. Clearly, the weight of personal responsibility can not be underestimated. What will be the meaning of safety for women who can take advantage of such therapeutic opportunities? What hope does it offer for the many women who do not have access to such services? Can the concept of safety as addressed by women in

their individual actions lay a foundation for future individual and social changes that increase our knowledge of what it takes to be safe? The complexity of such questions pose more challenges to generating knowledge of the everyday experience.

Safety Constructed by a Search for the Meaning of a Phenomenon

Contextual studies have become more prevalent in the literature on patterns of violence in the lives of girls and women (Barnsley, et al., 1980; Bishop, 1988; Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Hoff, 1990; Jones, 1980, 1994; Schecter, 1982; Yllo & Bograd, 1988). The research work has contributed to and encouraged the process of theory building, using existing analysis to help make the connections. Such feminist analyses (which begins with women) have been guided by a desire to describe the specific issues of violence against women and to provide an understanding of the overall patterns. Greater understanding of the links among such issues as the proportion of child sexual abuse among women who enter shelters, the common history of childhood sexual abuse among women and children in prostitution, the prevalence of pornography in the abuse of women and children, commonalities in the descriptions of their experiences of different forms of male violence, as well as commonalities in the feminists' analysis of the issues, have resulted in broader perspectives on the issues and connections among them. As an example, the reading guide prepared by Price (1989) has formulated nine

useful statements of the themes that have been gleaned from investigative studies of women's experiences:

1. It is men who do violence to women: women are the victims, men the abusers.
2. The violence done to women by men is real, is serious, is damaging to the point of life threatening.
3. Women don't like, desire, need, or deserve the violence done to them.
4. Women try to avoid or halt the violence done to them but are hampered in doing so by what women are taught is "femininity".
5. Women learn about men's violence in a variety of ways starting at an early age:
    i) they learn about violence directly at the hands of the abusers, often in a number of forms and a number of circumstances;
    ii) they learn about violence by witnessing men abuse other women --their mothers, sisters, daughters, female co-workers;
    iii) they learn about violence by listening to cultural messages, by hearing the violence done to women dismissed, tolerated, condoned, supported, and even celebrated by the abusers themselves, by friends, and relations, by authorities women turn to for help, and by our society and culture in general.
6. In learning about male violence in these various ways women learn a key lesson in femininity. Femininity describes what women are supposed to be. It includes being weak, passive, vulnerable, and sexually available to men. The femininity lesson women learn through male violence is that women are abusable, that it is normal and acceptable for men to abuse women, and that to be a woman is to be both a target of and responsible for male violence.
7. Women experience different forms of male violence in very similar ways. There are, however, important differences among the issues, just as there are variations in individual experience.
8. Women's experience of male violence may be influenced by factors such as race, class, age, geographic setting, and mental and physical condition. In particular, the experiences of Native, immigrant and disabled women may be distinct in some respects from the experience of white, Canadian-born or able-bodied women.

> 9. Men sometimes give reasons or justifications for the violence they do to women, for example, it is a man's right or that the woman is to blame for it. Their reasons are inadequate. The violence done to women by men is inexcusable.
>
> (pp. 4-5)

Quoting these themes provides a context for the assumptions that have formed the basis of a feminist analysis and subsequent thinking in the current research reviewed for this study. It is important, however, to acknowledge that "feminist" research and scholarship does not imply a monolithic viewpoint on gender issues. Feminist perspectives are typically classified as liberal, socialist, radical and psychoanalytic. While all feminists are concerned about women's equality, they differ, sometimes widely, about how such equality can be achieved and about their vision of an egalitarian society.

However, a sufficient body of knowledge and practical expertise now exists among feminists and other social activists making further investigation and reflection possible. By investigating the links among issues of violence against woman, continued research can hope to better understand how woman live, what women experience and what systems of support more effectively meet women's needs. It is essential work to undertake. By learning and telling the truth of women's experience, such search for meaning can offer better support for women's survival. The belief in the need for continued investigation by academics, feminist activists, counselors, and front-line workers in describing emerging issues and areas for further study form the

basic motives for conducting this project - exploring the meaning of safety for women who have been abused by an intimate partner.

Researching, reading and talking about male violence against women is hard. Those of us who have experienced such violence may find that reading about other women's experiences triggers painful memories, while those of us who so far have avoided male violence, may be concerned that learning more about it will only feed fear, that we can feel safe only if we do not know the possibilities. We may worry that learning too much will make us hopeless or that we will come to hate men. We may simply wish to deny knowledge which is painful, horrifying or enraging. But as hard as it is, living with it is harder. When we wish to avoid or forget, it seems necessary to remember the women who can't forget. When we wish to remain ignorant it may remind us of our own experiences of being treated with disbelief by others who do not want to know.

The other side to this kind of search for knowledge, are the stories of women's survival. Women do survive in the literal sense, they outlive the violence done to them, they also endure when they have to, escape when they can, and live beyond the violence. Exploring one aspect of this survival is to ask what women know about safety - the intention of this qualitative study. Listening to women who have survived tell their stories and knowing something about their lives may give courage to discover and to act. Individual accounts add a great deal to our understanding of women's experience.

Research in the qualitative tradition offers a vehicle for deeper understanding, a method for asking questions - especially about those everyday concepts that are fundamental to the way we manage our lives.

It is difficult to question something that is so much part of the social and psychological fiber of life. Familiarity with the everyday construct of safety obscures some of its meaning and implications. To answer questions such as "what is the common experience of safety for women who have been abused?", "what are the implications for all women?" requires a richer and deeper understanding of the accounts of women surviving male violence. We must go to the source itself, to the women who have had the experience and can articulate the experience. Another interpretation of their "text" may help us "see" safety as if for the first time.

Summary

The intention of this chapter has been to explore the construct of safety as revealed through my interpretation of the efforts our society, culture and individuals to address the concerns for women who live with violence from their intimate partners. This interpretation of historical and social actions to construct a "safer" world began with an overview of a feminist theoretical analysis of the social structures of our culture. This was followed by a brief outline of the contemporary legal and social policies designed to protect the right of woman to freedom from bodily harm, a description of the value of providing information to change attitudes and its application to preventative

educational efforts, especially for children, the acknowledgment of the various definitions and use of the language in the media, academe, social institutions and everyday conversations. A characterization of the grass-roots shelter movement providing refuges of safety, precedes an interpretive review of therapeutic intervention approaches championed by the formal social supports available to survivors. The chapter concludes with an interpretation of the value of knowledge gained from a search for meaning deepened by a qualitative method of inquiry by reflecting on the conscious description and interpretation of a woman's experience of the phenomenon of safety.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND DECISIONS

Investigating the meaning of the abused woman's experience with safety requires a special method, a different perspective. The "safety experience" must somehow be revealed and interpreted. Phenomenological investigations are uniquely suited to studies attempting to illuminate the meaning of an experience, and are concerned with the person as subject rather than as object. The main assumption is that experience is grounded in existence. The tradition of existential phenomenological is rooted in the main currency of the term "existential" from the French influence after 1945, but the tendency was known from German thought from the 1920s and is usually traced back to Kierkegaard in mid-19th Century. The meaning of the term is a based on existence as a specifically human quality, as distinct from other things. Existence is contrasted with essence, but the tradition has been colored by the critique of idealism and metaphysics, complicating the current use of the term. Where a definition of essence in the sense of something fundamental or intrinsic is required, the term implies that which is derived from the qualities of existence, that is of actual being. The main thrust of the current use of the term "existential" is towards a sense of uniqueness and unpredictability in any actual life, with a corresponding sense of rejection of determination, or explanation of inherent forces. Therein lie the assumptions embedded in the tendency to use the term. Assumptions that include the condition of freedom to

choose and to act in unique and unpredictable ways and a sense of urgency and anxiety which implies that taking responsibility of one's own life, with no certainty of known outcome in terms of some known scheme, provoke an obvious anxiety. This has led to some confusion of the use of the term with simple descriptive uses for "living" and "actuality."

The Phenomenological Tradition

Phenomenology derives from the Greek word phenomenon, which means to "show itself," to put into light or manifest something that can become visible in itself (Heidegger, 1962). Phenomenology assumes that humans are aware of being aware and this awareness makes human experience different from other phenomena. Existential-phenomenology eliminates a premise of dualism, and presupposes a shared reality whereby the "world" and "Being" each exist because of the other.

Phenomenological inquiry rests with a dialogue of key philosophic approaches to phenomenology as articulated by Husserlian and Heideggerian thought (Ray, 1994). The Husserlian tradition is described as transcendental (descriptive) and the Heideggerian tradition as hermeneutic (interpretive). Consequently there are differing philosophical, theoretical, and methodological approaches to phenomenological inquiry. Thus phenomenology is a philosophy or variety of distinct, yet related, philosophies, though it is concerned with approach and method. The Husserlian tradition or eidetic phenomenology is epistemological and emphasizes a return to reflective

intuition to describe or clarify experience as lived and constituted in consciousness (awareness) (Husserl, 1970). The hermeneutic phenomenological tradition or interpretative approach is ontological, a way of being in the social-historical world where the fundamental dimension of human consciousness is historical and socio-cultural and is expressed through language (text). It is central to Gadamerian, Heideggerian, and Ricoeurian philosophies (Ray, 1994). It is within this hermeneutic tradition that the study wished to focus, to return to the interpretive way of exploring the women's way of knowing and expressing their views about the nature of safety.

Theoretical Concerns

In phenomenology, theoretic concerns arise within three spheres: whether there is or should be theory at all; theory emerging from the reflective analysis of data (narrative text); and theory that guides the research process. Because phenomenology is drawn from reflective analysis of the meaning of life experiences, it is temporal (in the Husserlian sense) and historical in the Heidegerrian sense. van Manen (1990) argues that although interpretive theorizing is acceptable, theory, as such, is antithetical to phenomenology. Ray (1994) argues that theory, rather than being the conceptual sum of its parts, reveals a process of possibilities that, when captured as insight and represented as a narrative or model, belongs to the inner structure of meaning and understanding.

Ray's (1994) theoretical position states that reflective insight

communicates a relationship between the human experience represented in the text as themes, metathemes or metaphor, and compassion and self-understanding with the whole of the human condition. In this sense, a theory captured from human experience is not isolated to the number of participants or from human knowledge or emotion arising at the point in time of the research. She believes it demonstrates a powerful representation or unity of meaning of belongingness and interconnections to the whole of the human condition both historically and universally.

The unity of meaning assumes that each part (the explicit part) can be expressed as a whole (the implied order). This theoretic position helps to alleviate the problems raised about subjectivity (as in a study of a few individuals at a point in time) and objectivity (as in a logical-positivist study), whereby the subjectivity is seen as individualistic, idiosyncratic and that objectivity is disciplined, methodological and generalizable.

The universality of subjectivity in Ray's (1994) theoretical position is understood in light of the idea that every language-use (expression) represents something common to many in a culture or to the human condition of many cultures and is, thus, part of the objective mind. This position of the universality of the subjectivity of human experience is not subjectivity toward an object, but subjectivity toward the history of its influence. Because we are human, it is possible to understand what it is like to be another human being and that all human beings are grounded in the social world that makes possible the

understanding of another's personal or social reality. This theoretical position underlies the methodological approach taken for this study. It was a rationalized choice to adopt a study of hermeneutic reflection that consisted of participating in a dialectic interpretation of the meaning of the research data (text) as a dynamic movement toward understanding. It was a conversation, a discussion, a debate, perhaps more theoretically described as the dialogic-dialectic. This method was meant to be an interpretive encounter with the research data (text) by way of reflecting on the parts (themes) and then moving to the meaning of the whole in relation to a respective theory. Meaning, rather than being captured in and of its itself, was read out of the text. The text was seen as part of the historical influences or past traditions and was, as such, the theory that guided the study. Within such historical interpretation, mediation of the method and the theory made further understanding possible.

A further theoretical question of point of view is intrinsic to hermeneutics. From what position does a researcher/participant speak or listen in a story-telling universe where all tell stories and all stories are valid though not necessarily true, because no one speaks from a transcendent vantage point? An approach of questioning and challenging within an attitude of validating a person's point of view comprises the hermeneutic stance. Intrinsic to this validation, is that of offering within a series of challenging , yet respectful conversations, words that give voice to hitherto inchoate experiences. Such words are not imposed from a "knowing" or "expert" point of view, but put forth

as if only to demonstrate that such experiences can be described and shared through language (Parry, 1991). Hermeneutics, the science of interpretation, has to do with the point of view with which one examines a given text to elicit the beliefs and assumptions that have influenced the selection of the material included. In short, the hermeneutic stance represents an acknowledgment that in a world in which there is no privileged or absolute vantage point, all the researcher has is her point of view as she deals with a universe of points of view.

Methodological Concerns

Phenomenological investigations advance differing methodologies directly influenced by the study participants, research questions, data generation, and reflective analysis and theory development. Correspondingly, the approach (method) is seen to be grounded in the articulation of the researcher's viewpoint toward human beings and the world (Giorgi, 1970). The value and credibility of such a methodology can be more clearly judged when the researcher has explained the characteristics of the attitude or orientation that informs the work. This implies that the study will be accomplished in certain ways, and that those "ways" affect the research process and the results.

With respect to these assumptions, this study chose to explain the nature of the meaning of safety for the three study participants by subjectively contextualizing aspects of the culture, language, and life experiences of women who had been abused. Adopting this method extended understanding within a

descriptive and interpretative approach and was a way of capturing the meaning of the experience.

Because phenomenological investigations are temporal in nature and the idea of consciousness is intentional, the self is the recognized bearer of responsibility of experience firsthand (Reeder, 1988). This idea holds true for both the researcher and the study participant. Experience of things or phenomena include sense perceptions, and other phenomena, such as believing, remembering, anticipating, judging, intuiting, feeling, caring, loving, imagining, and willing. An act of consciousness includes these multiple modes of awareness. In other words, the internal time, the moment of the unitary present (the "now") in a conscious act - the just-past and the about-to-be, called, respectively, rememberings and anticipations - as described by Kohak's (1978) interpretation of Husserl, are viewed as an intrinsic part of the temporal ordering of conscious processes.

Following in the tradition, this study also made the assumption that consciousness was intentional. The objects of conscious experience were interpreted to be integral; consciousness was always "of something," always related to consciousness of things of the world. This illuminated the relationship between the knower and the known as one. As such, this assumption of integral evidence was distinguished from purely objective evidence (as espoused in positivist methodology), incorporating a reflexive element and acknowledging the role of the active mind in coming to know the

world. In this sense, the experience expressed by the participants of this study, whether past, present or anticipated, was the nature of the data. The data was captured and transcribed as text. The data was then subject to the particular philosophic approach that I started with - both, descriptive and interpretive - and as such, determined the nature of the analysis.

Empirical Considerations

As a research approach, phenomenology is a way of thinking about what experiences are like for people including a description of the meaning these experiences have (Omery, 1983). This study was an attempt to understand empirical matters from the perspective of those being studied, to interpret and understand, rather than to observe and explain. As such, it was not meant to generate theories or models, nor to generate general explanations.

A phenomenologist asks the question; "What is it like to have certain experiences?" Human phenomena such as safety, and events of being, such as being beaten, threatened, abused, or being "sheltered" are not objectlike. They have more to do with the "how" rather than the "what." As Munhall (1994) states: "These are not interior subjective states, but rather, references to living through engagement with the world, and the answers to these phenomenological questions are found in the themes of experience, perception, consciousness, embodiment, and the natural attitude" (p. 16).

According to Omery (1983), the "primary difference that distinguishes phenomenology from other qualitative methods is the requisite that no

preconceived notions, expectations, or frameworks be present or guide the researchers as they gather and analyze the data" (p. 61). Therefore, when using the phenomenological method, the researcher's perspective is bracketed. A common problem is that the researcher has too much information about the phenomenon under study.

This is an important aspect of the phenomenological method in this study, as my own perspective has been well developed. Adoption of this method dictates that I bracket my own personal view in order to hear and accurately reflect the lived experience of the woman herself. In keeping with the tradition of this research method, I have made every attempt to bracket my point of view by stating my assumptions and biases in the methodological chapter of this study. Further, in order to ensure that it was the woman's voice being heard and presented, a qualitative method of analysis has been adhered to in order to address the trustworthiness of a phenomenological method of inquiry. The qualitative analysis was informed by a feminist perspective.

Feminist Perspective

Phenomenological method represents a shift in point of view. In contrast to the objectification of social phenomenon, these phenomenon are seen as socially constructed created through the interpretive processes of human interactions. A feminist perspective goes beyond an examination of the intersubjective construction of meaning, to an examination of the interaction of power in human relations. As such the feminist perspective attempts to link the

personal and political dimensions of human experience and action both theoretically and methodologically. The women's situation is viewed within its wider social context whereby it is assumed that society's structural arrangements and dominant ideologies support the status quo and exacerbate the difficulties faced by those who seek to move outside traditional living patterns.

As a number of feminist researchers point out (Roberts, 1989), no single unitary "feminist perspective" can be identified and then applied in the research situation. Rather, as a female researcher, I have a certain imperfectly articulated view of society and how it operates and changes. Parts of this view are implicit rather than explicit, the view changed and developed according to what I had been reading or experiencing, and my task was to provide an account of that in my empirical research.

The three concepts of a feminist perspective that differentiate it from a nonsexist or women's issues approach are empowerment, emancipation, and an ethic of care. Empowerment theory is based on the assumption that societies consist of separate groups possessing different levels of power and control over resources. The theory views the main source of individual problems as arising not from personal deficits, but from the failure of society to meet the needs of all people. The potential for positive change is thought to exist within every individual, but negative behaviors and symptoms can emerge from attempts to cope with a hostile world. Although individuals can develop

less personally destructive coping strategies, changes in the power structure of society are considered crucial if individual problems are to be interrupted. From a feminist perspective, then, the issue is not just doing research from the standpoint of women that will make visible their experience, but doing research that aims to make visible issues of access to data about power relationships that inform women.

The emancipatory intention of a feminist perspective seeks to enable individuals to be active agents in their own right, freed of social constraints that are destructive or unjust (Fonow & Cook, 1991). Given my particular professional and personal history, this concept has influenced my choice of a researchable problem and the subsequent methodological considerations.

The incorporation of an ethic of caring within the feminist perspective acknowledges the emotional content of women's lives and is integral to my research goals. This attention to the affective components of a woman's life and the emotional connections between the "participant" and the researcher places a high value on the subjective nature of the research. It draws us to the question of what caring has to do with knowing. Typically we assume that caring has a place in practice, and eventually we may apply it to education, but we tend to question what could its relation be to the most basic enterprise, the generation of knowledge? In the dualistic approach to knowing, knowers stand outside the world, study it by observing, describing, classifying, counting, and the world is reduced to objects of our knowing. The ethic of caring as a way of

knowing, is understood from a relationship between subjects. It is impossible to have a relationship of caring with human beings whose subjective dimension has been subtracted in order to know them. Knowledge as it is often practiced in most disciplines, rests on the dualism between the knower and the known, subject and object.

My position as a researcher to incorporate an ethic of caring as part of a feminist perspective, challenges the purpose of knowledge, asking whether a way of knowing precludes caring or whether ways of knowing can express caring? As Gadow (1990) points out, we have a choice among ways of knowing. We do not have the choice of not knowing, because it is the nature of beings like us with subjectivity to formulate meanings, to come to terms with our world and ourselves. In short, to objectify, step out of the immediate, in order to focus on it, we make it the center of our consideration, the object of our wonder. We decide whether knowing is to accomplish for us distance from the world or engagement with it.

In social science, we want to order the world, to make sense of it in the knower's terms, to examine it in safety without the danger of being overwhelmed, and to reorganize it, where possible, to suit human desires. The detachment that this entails is our escape from the vulnerability inherent in any point of view in which we and the world are one. It is within this understanding, that I acknowledge the importance of an ethic of caring as integral to my engagement with a project about the meaning of safety. I wanted to account

for life experienced not life explained.

Finally, in doing this work, I have been constantly mindful of the jumbled links between feminist theory and politics and policies of the Women's Movement. No review of writings about the issues of power relations in the public and private sphere, the epistemology that argues that there is no way of seeing the world except through some specific embodied person who brings her biography to the experience, and the diversity and commonality of concrete women's life experiences, can ignore the intention of feminist theory (Farganis, 1994). It is a social theory that intends to make people conscious of social arrangements as a prelude to action. As a theory it presumes that gender matters; that gender is of such import that it cannot be reduced to one variable among many, even if we allow that other factors are interwoven into gender accounts - class, race, religion, nationality, sexual diversity, physical ableness, age; that differences exist between genders; and that gender is social, it goes beyond individualistic assumptions, is integral to the social ethos. Feminist theory is a form of scholarship that struggles with the definition of equality and the numerous subthemes of diversity and differences, tackles important moral issues of how people ought to live, and operates at the grassroots level and on the national scenes, affecting public opinion and electoral polls.

By incorporating a feminist perspective, I acknowledge that I have actively engaged in the discourse that struggles with the themes of a woman's standpoint, equitable treatment and the postmodern rendering of "difference"

(Ferganis, 1994). This study is an example of my interest in bringing the life-world concerns of caring to the public enterprise. In engaging in the ideas of feminist theory, however, it is also incumbent on me to point out the tension between the promise of feminist theory, which is universalistic in its determination to alleviate the conditions of personkind by advancing the emancipation of women, and the exclusionary policies that follow from that theory.

Methods of Preparation

The idea that I might study the experiences of women moved me more clearly after accepting the more public role of participating in the operation of a women's shelter. The people who ran the shelter wanted to pay attention to what it takes to be respectful and sensitive to facilitating optimum conditions of safety for women and children at risk of being hurt. I wished to contribute to such an effort. During the time of my involvement, I thought a lot about my beliefs around taking personal responsibility for an environment which facilitated safety, about the "policy" decisions I made, about my beliefs that it was possible to take charge of your own life, and about my value for personal power while facing the contradictions of power, domination, violence and control. Such examinations were part of my preparation for engagement in thinking about women's experiences with the notion of safety.

The basic notion that an individual is capable of taking charge of her life, in my view, was predicated on the idea that a woman's belief about her

personal power is not entirely affirmed because she has access to external resources and knowledge. Personal power may be nourished from without but I believed that it was primarily rooted in an inner assertion, a self-knowing. For this reason I did not quite believe the notion that one individual could empower another as this would, in effect, deny the power of the other. In fact, when one person exerts more control (uses her power) the balance of power seems to shift and the one feels more vulnerable to the other. This led to more questions. What does a vulnerable women understand about her safety when the balance of power shifts and she is rendered more vulnerable? Can she change that balance? Does she know when it is shifting? What has she been taught about the balance of power? What threatens her personal sense of power?

I wondered about the responsibility and necessity of each woman to actualize her personal power. As I was engaged in academic courses that examined the methods social scientists choose in discovering and knowing the nature and meaning of significant experiences, I took the opportunity to examine my ideas about power through different lenses. One method of "knowing" that was available to me began in a graduate class. The class mentored a method that encouraged my becoming quiet and listening; coming to an inner "clearing," connecting with the dominant question of power, describing that experience in my journals, determining the qualities, the constant parts, and core themes; considering possible meanings; and arriving

at an understanding of the essences of my experiences with power.

Formulating the Question

In exploring such notions, I wondered: What is the nature of power? Who holds the power? How is power communicated? What tactics are used to maintain the power? Do you have power because you are competent or because you play certain roles? Is power logical or illogical? Is power predictable or erratic? Who makes critical decisions? How are conflicts resolved? In developing a fuller description of my experiences of power in interpersonal relationships I wanted to know whether actualizing personal power meant knowing/feeling "safe." I knew that I needed to feel powerful in order to be creative, to be energetic. I also knew that to be comforted, to feel tolerance, and to love I needed to feel free from danger. I know I can think, speak, cry, laugh, and act without fear of disapproval or punishment sometimes - a realization that, for me, I feel safest when there is a balance of power. I became aware that I held to the notion that "to know" safety was a requirement for me to feel fully "alive", so that I could be fully conscious and present in the world around me. During this time of "student" reflections, I heard stories of many women who reported that they were never safe in or out of their homes, with or without their intimate partners. Some sought shelter, others did not. What did they know that kept them "alive," as I had come to understand that term?

The fact of these matters was persistently obvious during my tenure as a

volunteer at the emergency shelter for women and their children. The demands for safety were great, the responses inadequate. If the individual solutions were to be uncovered in the safety of a shelter, there were never even enough beds for women to begin the processes that might reduce her vulnerability. For some, even so, the effort to provide a physical shelter with bullet-proof windows and secure locks for over thirty women and children to eat and sleep with lots of other women who had been hurt, was woefully inadequate, not altogether safe. A place to live for three short weeks, often seemed to be a hollow, elusive gesture of caring. What did the women experience that informed them about their safety?

The shelter movement is rooted in the subjective experience of women relating to another women's concerns and needs for safety and caring. Yet, within a comparatively short time, the complexity of these efforts of caring have been professionalized with a set of standardized practices to improve efficiency and effectiveness, while, perhaps, losing the meaning and heart of the good intentions. The decaying of this rescue process, the dark shadow of good intentions, weighed heavily on me as I became more informed about the activities within the shelter.

The day-to-day activities of "intake, referral, admission, discharge" were reminders of my earliest experiences in that large institution of the past. The impact of living with strangers in congregated facilities, in places managed by paid caregivers, funded on the basis of public charity, organized to control the

will of one to accommodate for the many, was well-known to me. My memory of knowing about women rejected and destroyed by institutionalized living in a seventy-bed ward, bumped up against the stories of women who, having escaped regular beatings at home, entered a "safe" place that became another agent of power and social control, and it overwhelmed me. I could not "rationalize" these two stories. Could I endorse the shelter as a "response," wondering whether the shelter created a sense of loss of the necessary power, identity and connectedness associated with feeling safe? I was beginning to formulate questions about the nature of a woman's experience before and after she lived with violence in her intimate relationships. What did it mean for her? When was she safe? What was her experience when she left an abusive relationship? Did leaving change her sense of vulnerability? What did she know to do to be safer? Would she ever feel safe? What were her experiences with acts of "safety?"

My focus was to understand how women create some sort of meaning and understanding of safety from their experience with abuse. From a symbolic interactionist point of view, meaning and understanding are not accomplished in a vacuum, but are assumed to arise out of the woman's experiences that are grounded in social interactions. Some of the assumptions about safety come out of our socially shaped attitudes and ideas about being a woman, a mother, a daughter, a sister, a wife, being married, having a family, being personally responsible, being hurt, and beliefs about

spirituality. I explored many of these ideas and assumptions in the course of preparing for the interviews.

Theoretical Sensitivity

My personal engagement with the research situation and my awareness of the subtleties of meaning of data depend on my previous reading and experience with or relevance to the area. All of this is done in a conceptual rather than concrete manner. As such, theoretical sensitivity refers to the attribute of having insight, the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand, and the capability to separate the pertinent from that which is not (Straus & Corbin, 1990). Sources of theoretical sensitivity include professional experience, personal experience, and the analytic process itself.

Bracketing

Bracketing is one such analytic process within the methodological tradition of phenomenology (Husserl, 1962). In bracketing, one holds some phenomenon up for close and careful inspection. It is removed from the natural world where it occurs and then is examined. This unmasks, defines, and determines the basic elements and essential structures of the phenomenon (Berg, 1995). For example, in this project, I might consider all the activities/notions that were described as "safe" in the violent times experienced by the woman per se and bracket, or hold in exclusion, the social history of the abuser, the victim, and other precursors that may have led to the episode.

As the research question for this study unfolded, I began to recall my

early experiences of danger. I reflected on my own socialization, my understanding of power, my educational experiences, my personal relationships, and my work life. I kept a personal journal throughout all the phases of the research process and recorded "personal memos" of ideas that I read or discussed. I also corresponded with colleagues about my thoughts and feelings around the research topic.

I conducted this exercise for a number of reasons. Firstly, bracketing helped me become aware of my own interpretative framework. Such reflections acted as a caution in becoming over zealous about my interpretations, and acted as a guard against leading the participants to respond to those experiences that I had identified as my own. Secondly, I wanted to be better able to identify the experiences as revealed in other women's reflections. Without overly structuring my interviews, I wanted to keep the participants "on track." Finally, because interpretation is contextual, I felt an obligation to the reader to provide the project with more background to assist in the assessment of the quality of the study. It is important to the methodology that the readers are assured that I have some familiarity with both my reflections and the public discourse of the experience. Accordingly, my personal account is part of Chapter One, while published research and theoretical material has been presented in Chapter Two.

Selection of the Participants

Given the nature of the population to be studied and the purpose of this

empirical component of the project, criterion based selection, also known as purposive sampling, was chosen. According to Wertz (1984) the "most basic, minimal criterion for the choice [participants] is whether a potential subject has or can develop some illuminating relation to the phenomenon under study" (p. 36). This method is also described by Morse (1989) as "selecting the best informant who is able to meet the informational needs of the study ... and selecting a "good informant....one who is articulate, reflective, and willing to share with the interviewer" (p. 117).

Purposive (or purposeful) sampling is not meant to be representative nor typical. Instead, it is intended to maximize the range of information covered, to understand select cases without needing to generalize to all cases. It requires that certain information is known to the perspective participants so that the researcher is able to decide from which cases she can learn the most (Guba, 1981). Moustakas (1994) declares that there are no in-advance criteria for locating and selecting the research participants. General consideration often include: age, race, religion, ethnic and cultural factors, gender, and political and economic factors. Essential criteria include: the research participant has experienced the phenomenon; is intensely interested in understanding its nature and meanings; is willing to participate in a lengthy interview and, perhaps, follow-up interviews; and grants the researcher the right to tape-record the interview, and publish the data in a dissertation or in other publications.

The criteria for selection of women for this study included: (a) women over 18 years of age who had experienced abuse from their intimate partners, and were subsequently not involved in an abusive relationship; (b) women who agreed to participate in the research study; (c) women who were ready to participate, assessed not only in terms of how long they had been out of the abusive relationship, but by their willingness and ability to share information that was intensely personal, sensitive and private; and (d) were available for multiple interviews and were willing to read their transcripts and reaffirm their reflections in follow-up interviews.

The women who chose to participate came from both my personal network and from professional referrals following written requests and a personal presentation about the purpose of the research to an Outreach Program of a women's shelter. Only names of women who had agreed to be contacted were given to the researcher.

It is difficult to predict the required sample size in qualitative research such as this. I collected data until no new information was obtained, adopting the practice outlined by Field and Morse (1985) that I could describe and justify the final sample size but was not able to predict the required sample size beforehand.

In each case, the volunteer was contacted by the researcher to further describe the study, to assess the appropriateness of her participation, and to advise about the nature of her involvement. Each volunteer was informed of the

intent and purpose of the study. The women, who responded with interest, fit the criteria of having experienced physical and emotional abuse from their husbands, subsequent separation or divorce from their partners, and it had been one to fifteen years since the last incident of abuse.

In locating participants and enlisting them for the study, I prepared a written proposal describing the nature and purpose of the study and gave a copy to the respondents. Each women who then replied by telephone was contacted and a 30 minute interview was arranged at a time and place that was mutually agreeable. From the interview and a discussion of the nature and purpose of the study, I determined whether the volunteer was an appropriate co-researcher for the investigation. Following this phase, it was mutually agreed by myself and several of the volunteers, that they were not able to become participants in the research study, given their circumstances and the time needed to participate.

Each of the chosen participants (co-researchers) expressed an interest in the open-ended nature of the study and offered to commit time and personal energy to the work involved in multiple interviews sharing their personal experiences, were willing for the interviews to be tape-recorded, were willing to read their transcripts, were willing to re-affirm their interpretations in follow-up interviews, and were willing to have the data used in a doctoral dissertation and publications. Each participant was articulate with the ability to express concrete and abstract ideas and feelings fluently.

In the preliminary instructions to the participants, I conveyed that I would share with them the specific material from their interview, that I would remove all identifying data, including the name of the participant, and that the participant would be free to withdraw at any time during the research. When mutual agreement was reached, a Statement of Informed Consent was signed. (See APPENDIX 1). A date and time for the first of the interviews was mutually agreed upon. I encouraged each participant to think about her experiences of safety before the next interview, and to join with me in coming to a greater understanding about this phenomenon by sharing her stories when we next met.

Following the pre-interview meeting, I reflected on the research question, wrote further thoughts in my journal, and formulated several opening statements to begin the interviews. The purpose of the statements was to provide me with a standard way to begin the interview and to encourage the participant to view me as committed to her responses and to the research.

Interview Procedure

The focus of this qualitative research method employed multiple interviews with three women and adopted a feminist approach. In this unstructured, in-depth interview format, every attempt was made to bracket my own perspective. Throughout the interviews I did ask for further clarification, but found that my efforts to direct the interview too much, appeared to interrupt the process more than elicit information. No further specific interview schedule

was prepared although the participants were asked to recall and describe their thoughts, feelings and actions surrounding their sense of safety prior to, during, and after their experiences with abusive partners. The women were asked to describe what was helpful or unhelpful throughout their experiences, and to offer any suggestions they may have for understanding the nature of safety. Naturally the interviews explored the beliefs, attitudes and assumptions that had shaped their understanding and influenced their meaning. In each interview, the women shared perceptions of their experiences when they were at odds with prevailing ideas and assumptions, framing the subsequent experiences in terms of interactions with others.

Having initially contacted the women over the phone, interview times were set to suit each person. Each woman was given the option of conducting the interview in their home, my office, or at a location that was most comfortable. While arranging interview times, I clarified that the interviews would be audio-taped and transcribed by a third party; outlined the steps taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity; and the possible length of time involved. Being fully informed of the procedure and the use of materials, before proceeding with the interview itself, each women was asked to review and sign the prepared Statement of Informed Consent.

Ethical Considerations

The subjective nature of a participatory research model welds the private and the public worlds and emphasizes experience and subjectivity as a

methodological route to abstraction and theory. An examination of some of the methodological and ethical problems which can emerge from such an interview procedure includes attention to the concepts of power, vulnerability and friendship.

A major commitment of feminist research has been to create theory and method which centers on women's perspectives and experiences so that they can understand themselves and their social world. For example, sociological concern with the family in the 1950s made it difficult to forget the women who had been systematically ignored in previous decades (Evans, 1982). However, as Harding (1987) argues, that although studying women is not new, studying them in ways advocated by feminists has "virtually no history at all" (p. 8). This meant more than adding women to what was already there and filling in the gap. It meant creating a knowledge in which women were subjects not objects; a reconstruction of meanings which both articulated the individual experience and promoted the women's collective interests (Stanley & Wise, 1983).

Feminist researchers (Finch, 1984; Oakley, 1981; Reinharz, 1983) advocate for a participatory model in an attempt to produce non-hierarchical, non-manipulative research relationships which have the potential to overcome the separation between the researcher and the researched. Various adaptation of the participatory model have led most feminist researchers to agree that the best way to find out about women's lives is to make interviewing an interactive experience (Cotterill, 1992). Oakley (1981) values the investment

of the interviewer's personal identity into the research relationship by expecting the researcher to answer respondents questions, share knowledge and experience, and give support when asked. Reciprocity of this nature invites intimacy, and, in Oakley's (1981) accounts can lead to friendships with the participants and that the best way to achieve non-hierarchical, intimate relationships is to appeal to their common experience as women. This view is shared by Finch (1984) and Duelli Klein (1983), who add that the very nature of the socialization of women reduces social distance and facilitates conversation between them.

Others would argue that women are divided by other variables (status, class, age, race, sexual preference and disability) and this can affect the research process. Post-modernist scholars (Ferganis, 1994) make the case for emphasizing women's commonalties with and differences from each other. This last decade has recognized the distinct and distinguishing characteristics of people, groups and nations. This post-modernist view understands that language and discourse (text and the like) construct what kind of women do exist, and women themselves construct their own lives. There is no blanket sense in which women are powerless; there are ways in which and sites at which women have power.

There is not sufficient evidence to assume, while women share important experiences as a consequences of their gender, that the structural barriers of status, race, class, age, and disability can be overridden by unique

forms of communication and understanding. This would also imply that it is still contentious to assume that interviewing can lead to the "transition to friendship" claimed by Oakley (1981). Women researchers need to distinguish between friendship and friendliness and not feel that the research relationship has somehow "failed" if only the latter is achieved. In fact, there are moral issues raised by an interview model that encourages friendship between women, yet has the potential to exploit them in order to gain data. It may be observed that the interviewee needs to know how to protect herself from the researcher.

At other times, the researcher, as a women, can also feel vulnerable and powerless in the research process. For most people, when placed in new situations in which the role may be unclear, there is a need to manage their own behavior. This "art of impression management" (Goffman, 1969) is present in all social interactions, but is most pronounced in such situations as talking to a stranger in a research interview. The respondent may want to please the researcher, accommodate with the "right" responses and so may mislead (not deliberately) by following the culturally defined rules for talking to strangers. Trust will need to be established between them if the researcher wishes to get beyond the more public accounts found in first interviews.

This argues for the multiple interviews undertaken in this study, for it is the manner in which the interview progresses and women begin to tell their stories of relationships in such a way as to reveal personal feelings and

doubts, and private accounts emerge. Although repeated interviews can develop into personal relationships between the interviewer and the interviewee and the "transition to friendship" claimed by Oakley (1981) can develop, it is also possible that the very nature of a woman's consignment to the privatized domestic sphere makes it likely that she welcomes the opportunity to talk to a "friendly stranger." Someone who does not exercise any social control and has limited status in her life creates the paradox. The relationship exists for the purpose of the research and it is terminated when the interviews are over. Indeed, the respondent may feel more comfortable talking to a "friendly stranger" because it allows her to exercise some control over the relationship. The "friendly stranger" who seeks to equalize the relationship between them, may only succeed in making the respondent more vulnerable.

It is assumed that no two in-depth interviews are the same. Forms of interaction between the researcher and the participant are highly individual, and it is impossible to predict the level of cooperation. It matters how they feel about the research and how they come to be included. I was willing to interview women who volunteered but levels of motivation varied and I could not always feel in control of the interview. Yet, it is expected that as the researcher, I should inspire confidence in the participant, if she is to continue with the assurance that it will all turn out competently.

The other concern is that the women may not agree with the researcher's interpretations of their lives if they do not share the political views

that shape those interpretations (Stanley & Wise, 1983). As the researcher, I had to be mindful of the conundrum - how not to undercut, discredit, or write-off a woman's consciousness different from our own. Ethically, I was entrusted to accept the validity of their experiences for themselves, and accepting the responsibility for representing their realities was the "right" thing to do.

I was also conscious of Finch's (1984) warning that data may be discussed in other ways that may argue against the women's collective interest. It is vital to design a way to produce research that makes sure the unique experiences of the individual are distinguished from collective experiences. This distinction is important if feminist research is to be a force for social and political change. I assumed that as a researcher, I have a responsibility to individual women who take part in research by presenting their own accounts. But the responsibility to promote women's collective interests may require that analysis of those accounts be in different terms, outside of those methods adopted for this research project. A further implication of this interview method, I would argue, is that the interview process is a fluid encounter where balances shift between and during the interviews, but, I accepted wholeheartedly that the final shift of power is balanced in favor of the researcher, for it is the researcher who walks away. The responsibility for how the data is analyzed and interpreted lies with me, the researcher. From that point on the researched are vulnerable. Their active role is over and whatever is produced is beyond their control.

Finally, although the women I interviewed expressed an interest in the outcome of the research, they will not benefit directly from it or, importantly, have control over what it contains. Doctoral theses which emerge from such work rarely reach the people they study. To deny that the issues of power and control shift and change, is to deny my subjective experience as a woman researcher. How I engaged in the interviews with other women was vitally important and had implications for the research, but, in the end the power and responsibility is mine. I interpret the accounts, I present the results to an audience which is largely inaccessible to the women I have interviewed. I believe that it is better to acknowledge my vulnerability in this experience as part of "putting the subjective in the knowledge."

Organization and Analysis of Data

Organization of the data began with the examination of the transcribed interviews and was studied through the methods and procedures of phenomenal analysis, as outlined by Moustakas (1994). The procedure included "horizontaling" the data and regarding every horizon or statement relevant to the topic and question as having equal value. From the "horizonalized" statements, the meaning or meaning units were listed. These were clustered into common categories or themes, removing overlapping and repetitive statements. The clustered themes and meanings were used to develop the "textural" descriptions of the experience. From the textural descriptions, structural descriptions and an integration of textures and

structures the meanings and essences of the phenomenon were constructed.

The principle approach to the interview data began with an examination of the smaller units moving to the larger or broader themes, a pattern that went from a more concrete to an increasingly abstract level of analysis. At each step, the analysis was guided by two considerations; to "tag" or distinguish the essential meaning of the women's description of the nature of safety as revealed through their experiences; and to remain as faithful as possible to the women's original characterizations.

The method of analysis is derived from Moustakas (1994) modification of the Van Kaam (1959, 1966) method designed for human science researchers. Using the complete transcription of each research participant, the steps included:

1. Listing and preliminary grouping (horizonalization) - a list of every expression relevant to the experience.

2. Reducing and eliminating - determining the constituents that do not vary by testing each expression for two requirements:

    a) necessary and sufficient constituents for understanding

    b) possibility for abstraction and labeling

Elimination of overlapping, repetitive and vague expressions.

3. Clustering and thematizing the constituents that do not vary (core themes of the experience.

4. Validating the final identification of the invariant constituents and themes

against the complete transcript of the participant by checking for:

a) explicit expression in the complete transcription

b) compatibility, if not explicitly expressed in transcriptions

c) if not explicit or compatible, delete.

5. Using the invariant constituents and themes, constructing an individual textural description of the experience for each participant, using verbatim examples from the transcribed interviews.

6. For each participant, constructing an individual structural description of the experience based on the textural descriptions and using imaginative variation, describing the meaning and essence of the experience.

7. From the individual textural-structural descriptions developing a composite description of the meanings and essences of the experience, representing the group as a whole.

This final stage of analysis involved the development of a conceptual classification system, and the representation of the essential themes. Through the process of identifying relationships between categories, developing conceptual understandings of what the categories meant, and identifying similar, recurring, or consistent themes, the categories were combined to encompass the essential or unifying themes. In some ways the ongoing categorization and final synthesis was assisted by the way in which the women shared their experiences in the form of a life story. Thus, there was a natural order and progression to the text itself. The task left to the researcher was to

select the different thematic aspects that were viewed as particularly primary (essential) or revealing about the phenomenon of safety throughout the lived experience of the women.

As I conducted this stage of the analysis, I was faced with the arguments associated with the doctrine of essentialism. Essentialism is a principle that believes that it is correct to distinguish between those properties of a thing, or kind of thing, that are essential to it, and those that are merely accidental. An accident, in Aritstotelian metaphysics, is the property of a thing which is no part of the essence of a thing: something it could lose or have added without ceasing to be the same thing or the same substance. The accidents divide into categories : quantity, action, quality, space, time, and relation. The main problem is to locate the grounds for this intuitive distinction of essential properties. One suggestion is that it arises simply from the ways of describing things, and therefore it is linguistic or even conventional (an artifact of human convention, similar to the conventions of etiquette, or grammar, or law) in origin.

As it was my role as the researcher to write about the interpretation of the themes, I imposed the method that one way of knowing about the phenomenon was to examine the text for the essential nature of safety in the lived experience and to contrast that with an examination of the opposing idea, that the nature of safety differed by a variety of accidental or contingent features brought about by social forces.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative inquiry, as adopted in the design and method of this project, is seen as inherently a social, political, and value-oriented activity and is, a such, challenged as incompatible with a scientific approach. To address the overall quality of a study of this nature Guba and Lincoln (1985) concentrate on methods the inquirer can employ to persuade the audience of the *trustworthiness* of the research; is the inquiry worth paying attention to, worth taking account of? Four kinds of trustworthiness are identified: truth value through credibility, applicability with transferability, consistency through dependability, and neutrality through confirmability.

The Credibility Issue

Credibility issues in qualitative analysis depend on three distinct but related elements (Alkin, et al., 1979; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Patton, 1990): the centrality of understanding and accepting the phenomenological paradigm; rigorous techniques and methods for gathering and analyzing high-quality data; and the close association and dependence on such personal and professional aspects of the researcher as training, experience, track record, status and presentation of self.

In keeping with the phenomenological tradition and the goals of this study to accurately reflect the lived experience of the women, the researcher addressed credibility by providing to each participant, initially, the research proposal and then the text after each interview. The subsequent interviews

included the participant's reflections on previous text and agreement was reached that the interpretation of the previous text was credible. Further, credibility was enhanced by prolonged engagement, in that interviews were allowed all the time the participants wanted to fully discuss their experiences. Audio-tapes, all related transcriptions, and coding tools have been kept as referential adequacy materials against which findings can be later tested if necessary.

As a researcher and psychologist with twenty-five years of work experience with women and issues of abuse and violence, including four years of volunteer experience in a women's shelter, a professor who has taught research methods courses for over ten years, and as a woman who has examined the theoretical and conceptual issues associated with the social, economic, political and psychological conditions of marginalized groups in our culture, I presented myself as having a credible degree of familiarity with the phenomenon under study. As well, every attempt was made to set aside my own ideas and biases, in order to better listen to the lived experiences the women chose to talk about in our mutual interest to study the construct of safety.

Applicability through Transferability

Another common concern about qualitative methods is the small sample size, as was true of this study. As it was the intention of this study to be descriptive, small, carefully selected, information rich, purposeful sampling

was chosen as a way to more comprehensively describe the contextual conditions. There are relative strengths and weaknesses inherent in different sampling strategies. In this case, an understanding of the lived experience of women within their social, psychological, economic, and political contexts compelled me to be concerned about generalizing. Generalization based on statistical inferences drawn from data collected at one or a few points in a time or findings based on large sample sizes, are often stripped of their context, especially when generalized across time and space. Cronbach (1975) concludes that generalizations seem to decay over time, at one time a conclusion seems to fit the situation, later it seems to account for little of the variance, and finally it is only valid as history. My theoretical, professional and personal experience of the issues led me to the epistemological position that the social phenomenon was too variable and context-bound to permit very significant empirical generalizations. Thus, in this qualitative inquiry I provided a rich description of the participants lived experience with the use of extensive quotes and a thick description of the context in which the phenomenon was studied, as a way to address the issue of transferability through application.

Consistency through Dependability

Guba (1981) argued that meeting the criteria of dependability can be addressed through enhancing the consistency of findings. To adhere to this proposed criteria, the research method adopted in this study provided a dense

description of the data gathering, data analysis and interpretation activities conducted.

Neutrality through Confirmability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that confirmability be the criterion of neutrality in qualitative research. Confirmablity in this context, refers to the findings themselves. To meet this criteria, this study sought to address confirmability through the practice of reflexivity and an audit trail provided by the transcription of all interviews. Adequate records have been kept throughout the study, including all transcripts, audio-tapes, field notes, data reduction products (themes, coding tags, etc.), and analysis materials.

Confidentiality and Ethical Considerations

Prior to setting up the interviews with the participants, the research proposal and a copy of the Statement of Informed Consent (Appendix 1) was submitted to the Ethics Committee, and approval received. The consent form was reviewed with each participant to ensure that consent was freely and knowingly given, clarifying that they could withdraw at any time from the interview and that no information would be used if they so desired. Permission for audio-taping was received prior to the interview. The participants were fully advised of the measures that would be taken to ensure their anonymity and confidentiality. The participants were advised that upon completion of the dissertation defense, the tapes and coding materials would be destroyed, and that the dissertation would ensure anonymity even when their own words were

used. The women were informed that the audio-tapes would be transcribed by a third party, and that adherence to ethical and confidentiality standards had been addressed with that person. Each woman was given copies of her transcripts and informed that all other copies would be destroyed upon completion of the defense of the dissertation.

The main ethical consideration addressed was the risk of the interview generating memories and issues that might be emotionally upsetting. Informed of this possibility and a subsequent discussion of the appropriate action to take led to an agreement with each woman that I would arrange, if desired, access to an appropriate person for further conversation or debriefing. As well, I ensured that any necessary debriefing had taken place prior to ending each interview.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGICAL FOCUS AND INTRODUCTION TO THE WOMEN

Informed by my literature review and my personal and professional experience, I interviewed three women who have experienced abuse from their intimate partners. Each interview with each woman was audio-taped and transcribed. The texts that were created became the source of phenomenological reflection. In this hermeneutic phenomenological human science the interview served a very specific function. These interviews were used as a vehicle to develop a conversational relation with each woman (interviewee) about the meaning of the notion of safety. As we engaged in the conversation it was critical to stay close to the experience as lived. In asking what the experience was like, it was important to be concrete. I asked the woman to think of a specific instance, situation, person, or event that would help us to explore the whole experience to the fullest. It was not possible to create ready made questions, nor to report the findings in the form of answers to those questions. The methodological purpose was to grasp the essential meaning of safety through reflection.

Phenomenological reflection of human experience is both easy and difficult. In elucidating the difference between pre-reflective lived understanding and our reflective grasp of a lived phenomenon, van Manen (1990) uses the example of the difficulty in explaining the essence of the meaning of "time," even though it is something we constantly do understand in everyday life.

Similarly, the notion of safety was seen as both easy and difficult to grasp. What could be more easily grasped than safety? We act every day in ways that keep us out of harm's way: what we eat, drink, drive, where we walk, sit, sleep; when we talk, pray, make love; how we dress, talk, move; who we love, avoid, live with. However, insight into the essence of the phenomenon of safety takes those pre-reflective descriptions through a process of reflectively appropriating, clarifying, and making explicit the structure of meaning of the lived experience. Nor is meaning or essence of the phenomenon one-dimensional rather, it is multi-dimensional and
multi-layered.

Adoption of this human science method required the communication of the experiences textually - by organizing the narrative. This meant that the conversations with the women were crafted into a text and the text was approached in terms of meaning units, structures of meaning, or themes. Reflecting on lived experience thus became the task - reflectively analyzing the structural or thematic aspects of the women's understanding of the meaning of "safe."

Thematic analysis is used in various disciplines in the humanities, arts, and literary criticism. In this human science research project the phenomenological description and interpretation of lived experience was done by making something of the text. The themes gave control and order to the research and the writing of the analysis. It was not a rule-bound process but a

free act of "seeing" meaning. Following van Manen's (1990) explanation, the themes were understood as the experiential structures that make up the experience, but just as he cautioned, it was simplistic to think of themes as conceptual formulations or categorical statements.

As an example of the idea of "theme" in understanding the everyday life concern of safety, it was useful to reflect on concrete situations: a husband, life with a husband, which prompted asking more reflective questions. The question "Did I do the right thing as a wife?" forced us to come to terms with the particular (this husband, this situation, this action) under the understanding of the universal meaning of safety. As we were seeking meaning the themes were used as a way to bring the examples to reflective understanding by "fixing them in some way" (van Manen, 1990, p. 86).

The experience of "fixing" on the significance of the situations the women described as a method of reflecting on the thematic context of safety, revealed important understandings. The way in which the themes related to the phenomenon, constructed both the possibilities and the limitations of being able to "fix" the notion of safety. The themes that were examined provided the focus or the point of the narrative, the process allowed a form of capturing the phenomenon, but at best it was a simplification of the notion, it fell short as a summary of the notion.

The approach I took toward revealing or isolating the thematic aspects of the phenomenon of safety involved several aspects. Initially I read my field

notes and listened to the tapes, then read all of the text of each interview and tried to capture the fundamental meaning of the text as a whole, by creating a phrase that gave it a focus. Then I reread the text and highlighted statements or phrases that seemed to be essential to uncovering something about the phenomenon or experience being described. Finally, I looked at every sentence or phrase to determine if the notion of safety was being described.

Throughout this process I continued to read about other phenomenological research efforts that explored the human condition in everyday situations and relations. In doing so, I was further informed by van Manen's (1990) descriptions of the grounding level of human existence which he ascertained can be understood in fundamental thematic structures. He claimed that four fundamental existential themes pervade the lifeworlds of all human beings, regardless of how they are situated historically, culturally, or socially and can provide useful guides for reflection in the research process. Van Manen (1990) named the lifeworld existentials of lived space (spatiality), lived body (corporeality), lived time (temporality), and lived human relation (relationality or communality) as productive categories for the process of phenomenological question posing, reflecting and writing.

As a window into the lifeworlds of the women who participated in this research into the meaning of safety, it was helpful to compose very brief biographies of each woman. These brief descriptions gave some sense of the time, place and connections that served to sketch a landscape into which

interpretations of the essence of the women's text could be located. Described in the following pages, the three women were given the names Althea, Elizabeth and Sarah, pseudonyms that serve to protect their identity. It is important to note that each woman gave some descriptors of herself, while factual information was written as I understood it to occur.

Althea

As a white woman in her late forties, living in Alberta, she was the first daughter in a family of six children whose parents still lived together in Ontario. A. grew up in Ontario with both parents who were described as Roman Catholic, middle-classed, hard-working and burdened with bringing up the children. The father was reported to be physically and verbally abusive to the mother and the children, and both parents drank too much alcohol.

As a single woman, A. lived and worked in Eastern Canada, then travelled extensively while working in Germany, England and Switzerland. Prior to her marriage she lived with several different men in Europe, had two abortions, many different jobs, periods of anxiety and depression that, on one occasion, resulted in an attempted suicide and a short stay in a psychiatric ward of a hospital back in Canada.

She returned to Europe to live with a man, then met her future husband at the time the man she lived with wanted to end their relationship. This new relationship continued for two years while she lived in Geneva and he lived in Germany. They took a one month holiday together in South-East Asia just prior

to their decision to marry in Canada.

Married at the age of 27 to this Canadian, she began her life as a military wife. Immediately, they moved to Newfoundland and she soon became pregnant and was also diagnosed with skin cancer. This resulted in surgery during her seventh month of pregnancy. The cancer was resolved, she had a second child and moved to many communities across Canada and in the Middle East. During this time she was a full-time at-home mother who did volunteer work and participated in amateur theatre performances wherever she lived. She described this period as a time of great loneliness, humiliations, isolation, failed attempts to fix or leave the marriage and her abuse of alcohol as a way to cope with the weekends.

A. left her husband about a year before these interviews. She and the two children went to a women's shelter for a week, at a time when she was so angry with her husband she was afraid that she might kill him if she did not get out of their home. During this time she experienced paralysis on one side of her face and down the corresponding side of her body, which went away after she left the home. Upon her return home from the shelter, the husband moved out to his own apartment.

A. chose to participate in this research after learning about the study through her continued contact with the outreach worker from that women's emergency shelter and, at the time, was in the midst of divorce proceedings. She continued to meet with the outreach worker over the weeks of her

participation in the research. At the time of the interviews, her two teenage children, a boy and a girl close in age, lived with their mother. Parents had shared custody, father had regular access, but contact was irregular.

During the period of the four interviews, she lost her job, sold and moved from the marital home into a smaller house outside the city, was faced with the father's challenge for sole custody of the children and the possibility that she would lose most other possessions (car, furniture, etc.) in a cash settlement proposal that was being negotiated between the lawyers. At the last interview, we discussed her tentative plans to move one more time, back to Ontario, and her hopes to retrain to improve her job possibilities. We arranged to meet again the next week to reflect on the last transcripts and complete our conversation. I met her several days later at a shopping mall to deliver the previous interview transcripts and confirmed our next meeting. She took the transcripts and agreed that we would meet in three days. However, she did not arrive, her phone had been disconnected with no new listing, and I was never able to contact her again.

Elizabeth

E. was a white woman, almost fifty years of age, the oldest child of a Protestant minister and his wife, with two younger brothers. At the time of the interviews, her parents continued to live in same city, as did her brothers and their families. She was born and raised in Alberta, living with a family who were loving, well respected members of their community, who held expectations that

their daughter would succeed in life. She was expected to be in control of her feelings and not to make mistakes. E. spent summers with grandparents, felt emotionally close to her grandmother and had confidence in her abilities.

E. did well academically, took music lessons and had such talent playing the piano, that she considered pursuing a career in music. She fell in love for the first time at about 19 years of age to a European man and left her parental home to marry at twenty-one. She had wanted to become nurse or pursue a music degree, but set those plans aside for marriage and a job in a bank.

Having moved to another province, within three years she gave birth to two boys, several years apart. The oldest boy was subsequently diagnosed with a rare genetic disorder that included features of mental retardation, metabolic problems and severe seizures. Although very little was known about the syndrome, doctors predicted a shorter life expectancy, and recommended that he be institutionalized. E. resisted these recommendations, a recurring threat throughout her life so far, and a conflict of values arose between herself and her husband as to what was the best course of action for their child. As a couple, they become less socially active and more isolated. Although her husband did not want her to work she continued to be involved in a number of volunteer activities. Her husband became involved with another younger women, so she decided to move to another city, separate from her husband, and create more emotional and physical distance in order to decide on what

further action should be taken.

E. worked and supported the children on her own for several years, receiving some financial child support from her ex-husband. Eventually, she was re-introduced to a man she had known in high school. At that time he was divorced, a former policeman, who treated her sons positively. They married a year after meeting again, but in about three months, she realized that he was emotionally disturbed, with extreme mood swings, that included verbal abuse directed at her and her sons. Over time, E. learned more about his family history of mental illness, his previous hospitalizations for depression, and his medical diagnosis of manic depression.

During this time, they had moved to smaller community in Alberta, some distance from her parents home. E. continued to work, and was very involved in volunteer activities related to developing community resources. Her husband appeared to become more resentful of her out-of-home activities, and quit his job without notice to become a writer.

Concerned about emotional and financial stability, E. pulled together some inheritance and other savings, and started a business in the food industry, working 16-18 days to get it established. Long working hours led to fatigue and a large weight loss, during which time her husband became sicker, more erratic. On one occasion, when her parents arrived for a visit, their concern for E.'s well-being led them to take her children back to their home to give her some respite. They also sent her to a hotel that night to "get a good

night's sleep". During that night, her husband came to the hotel, talked the night manager into letting him into her room and literally dragged her out of hotel. He took her back to their home and beat her up until the police came to stop the fight. Her physical assault required medical attention, once she had been taken to the police station and humiliated by their physical examination.

E. left everything behind the next day, filed for divorce, and went to live with her parents for a few months until she could get re-established. She talked with the medical profession about her husband's situation and decided that she could not help him get the help they recommended he needed. Having lost her financial investment and her husband she left town without any material support.

She began a new home with both children, worked three part time jobs, and took courses to improve her skills. After a few years one son went to live with his father (who had remarried) in another city and province. Her other son went to live in a group home. E. remained in constant contact with both children.

E. started her own business and struggled for several years, taking a number of risks to make it the success it has become. She worked long hours, managing a large number of staff, while continuing with many volunteer activities advocating for people with disabilities.

At the time of the interview, E. was dating a man but had no serious plans for a future together. Her sons were in their 20s at the time of the

interviews. One son lived temporarily with his father, who had moved back to the same city at the time of interview. Her oldest son had moved into his own home with a male roommate, and in-home support staff. E. saw or talked to her sons daily, was not married and lived alone in her own home at the time of the five interview sessions. She described herself as a spiritual person, who loved people and believed life had purpose and meaning. It had been about fifteen years since she had been physically assaulted by her second husband.

Sarah

A white woman living in Alberta, not quite forty years old at the time of the interview, S. grew up in Ontario with her mother, father, a sister and two brothers. She described her childhood as comfortable and happy although they moved many times during her school years. She did not know until early teens that father was an alcoholic as her mother did not discuss the troubles in the family. S. graduated from high school and worked in the hospitality industry. Her father died when S. was in her late twenties. Some years later, her mother remarried for a short time. S. maintained close contact with her family.

While in her early twenties, S. fell in love and married a European man who was some years older. She described this marriage as reducing her desire to go on to college or get any further education. She worked during the early years of marriage and was interested in cooking, cleaning, and maintaining an organized home. She moved across Canada many times due

to the nature of her husband's job, while she had a number of entry level jobs. Her first daughter was born three years after marriage, and second daughter was born five years later.

S.'s husband had become a heavy drinker, and as they moved to a number of major cities in Canada, S. became more social isolated. As a result of his alcoholism, they declared bankruptcy and lost all their possessions about one year before she left the marriage. At that time she was living outside a large city with no close friends or ongoing social support. Her husband was often drunk when at home, and she believed it was not safe to ever leave the children in his care. His verbal humiliations, indifference to a family life, and his drunkenness led her to fear that "she did not have a life," so began to make plans to organize her possessions to leave her home with her children.

When the oldest child was six and youngest a year old, she left quite shortly after her husband hit her. She left at a time when he was not at home, taking the children and only those basic possessions she could get into an old truck. Fearing that he would bother other people in trying to find her, she left a good-bye note on the kitchen table, went into the city, deciding not to contact any friends so that they would not be implicated in her husband's search for her.

She spent the first night in motel, with her sick baby, and finally on the second night was able to secure a bed in women's emergency shelter for her and the children, although baby was hospitalized for several days. During the weekend following her departure, her husband had auctioned all of the

possessions in the home. Unaware of this, S. had returned with a court order to split their assets, only to find the house was empty. Her husband left the country shortly thereafter. S. remained at the shelter until she could arrange subsidized apartment, social service funding and furniture. She had no independent financial resources, had very few basic possessions, and had to "make do" to manage the home and feed and clothe the children.

Once she had established a home for her and the children again, S. attended college, graduated with a professional diploma, and worked full-time in her field of training. In time, she also returned to the shelter to do volunteer work.

Over the next few years, S. met a man through her younger daughter's brownie pack. He had been previously married, had one daughter, and a steady job with a decent income. They married and bought a home, in which they still lived. S. also joined a new church, and became very involved in the work of that community.

At the time of the interviews, S. had lived with her second husband of eight years, her youngest daughter, and several teenagers who needed a safe home because of family or social troubles. S.'s oldest daughter lived in Europe, with her husband and new baby, nearer her father. S. and her youngest daughter also continue to have civil contact with her father, including visits to Europe. S. worked full time in her field while pursuing post-secondary studies.

S. became aware of the research through personal contact, was very interested in the research question, and asked to become involved so that she might reflect on these issues in light of her own experience. She participated, over several months, in seven interviews and reviewed the transcripts of all of the conversations.

CHAPTER FIVE

REFLECTIONS ON THE MEANING OF SAFETY

As each set of transcripts were read a number of times to get a feel for the content, significant statements were extracted and listed as meaning units. These meanings were labelled and paraphrased to provide an interpretation of the first order themes. First order themes for all participants were examined and clusters of second order themes were developed. A final ordering of themes was determined and as the author I attempted to capture the essence of the experience. It was at this point that the interpretation must stand on its own and be accepted or rejected.

First Order Thematic Analysis

The sorting of meaning units has been presented as a list of thematic labels with paraphrasing of the content in Tables 1 - 3 below.

Table 1

First Order Themes Paraphrased: Althea

Theme	Paraphrase
anger	at husband: she thought she could kill him could not tolerate him touching her, for taking half of possessions and forcing
sale	of house
anxiety	fear of father, "a panther waiting to strike" losing the pre-determined plot to her story failure to make good choices fear of being alone

(Table 1 continues)

Table 1 (Continued)

First Order Themes Paraphrased: Althea

Theme	Paraphrase
anxiety	husband's indifference about asking questions humiliation from others of abandonment of friends, relatives that nobody believed her stories fear of believing her lived experiences
betrayed	by parental messages: behave certain ways so you will be safe by beliefs: someone will love you, how the world should work by stories: romantic movies, musicals by choices taken: missed the boat, the train, the bus, took the wrong road by her body: one side of body became paralyzed everybody: had failed to keep her safe
confused	what is the right choice who is safe to be with things aren't what they seem surprised by events turning out badly cannot find a pattern
control	need to have tricks to manipulate what you want always losing sense of control
need the right man	need a man to be the boss he will protect, defend me better not to be alone
consequences of leaving	loss of job, money, material possessions protected husband from her anger

(Table 1 continues)

Table 1 (Continued)

First Order Themes Paraphrased: Althea

Theme	Paraphrase
consequences of leaving	listened to her body seizing up lost a home
optimism	things will change if I try harder it will get better hope to find the right road continue the search for a safe home look to the romantic ideal do not be negative keep looking for safety making plans for new job, more education
pretend	pretend to be a helper not the boss try to act perfect, don't show yourself polish your language, your furniture but it is harder to hide when exhausted not "there" when having sex with husband drank too much alcohol on weekends cannot trust what you know so it is better to pretend it will all turn out like a romantic movie ignore the feeling that you are all alone

TABLE 2

First Order Themes Paraphrased: Sarah

Theme	Paraphrase
recapturing touchstones	childhood memories of comfort, happiness
deep sense of loss	of unconditional love
	of innocence
	of inner self
	of childhood beliefs
	of trust in a partner
guilt	should have acted sooner
	silent when should have spoken up
	felt sorry for self
	did not look at the facts
bruised	inner core of self was battered
	needed time to heal
	night terrors
anxiety	fear of anger
	fear of moving
	fear of disorder, disorganization
	worry about disappointing parents
	avoid disagreements
	worry that will "flip" over and let spouse else look after her while she remains silent
longing	for a soul mate
	for lost love
	for good friends
sadness	loneliness over the years
	about what it takes to be safe
	cannot trust again
	children come before partner
	having to hide true feeling from family, friends
	shattered myths of marriage, male authority and love

Table 2 (continues)

TABLE 2 (continued)

First Order Themes Paraphrased: Sarah

Theme	Paraphrase
sadness	lost faith in people
	lost time
resolve	time to leave
	take risks to get safer
	no longer ignore need to speak up
	had to act alone to get safe
	close the door, face the black void
	to stop waiting for husband
	never to be socially isolated again
	stop moving from place to place
sense of control	know self
	in command of physical and emotional safety
	up to me to do it myself
	more self-centered
	can protect children
	assertive with social workers
	got more education
	do not rely on another person
	can help others because of what I do
	not a puppet on a string now
the awakening	a new opening
	knowing self in new ways
	knowing more about how the world works
	knowing that creating safety is a process that develops over time
	sees the bigger picture
	explore contradictions in feelings
	have to stay aware so safety not eroded
	now sees and hears the violence in the media
	knows what offends her
optimism	I can make a difference in providing a safe place for another person

Table 2 (continues)

TABLE 2 (continued)

First Order Themes Paraphrased: Sarah

Theme	Paraphrase
optimism	have hope for less violent future dreams of a more reciprocal relationship
caution	who you can talk to about what you see in the world when to speak up about violence, oppression can not show vulnerabilities especially to spouse
spirituality	importance of church community responsibility to help others call to action
to stay safe	turn off feelings or hide them peek "at the knife in your heart" for verification check "bank account" of feelings to see if any safer remember what happened draw lines around my heart do not rock the boat
in my head	safer to escape into my imagination go there when bored go there to feel happy not so safe since betrayed by night terrors
healing	join church community went to school learning about the inner me could imagine a safer future needed time

Table 2 (continues)

TABLE 2 (continued)

First Order Themes Paraphrased: Sarah

Theme	Paraphrase
disillusion	social structures/policies not helpful welfare system abusive, humiliating shelter a pit stop not a place to learn about safety
knowing	trust what I have experienced knows how to compare old beliefs with what happened know what it takes to belong know my strong values better not to pretend, face the "facts" know better what I need know about contradictions
anger	not a useful emotion better to smooth things over don't "do" anger, just deal with "it" not much anger ever expressed
protection	right to be protected by someone who says they love you can't provide my own protection distinct from being safe can protect my children an external "thing" comes from multiple relationships no one person can provide
contradictions	grief/loss and gaining new knowledge sadness and optimism needing others and not relying on anyone safety and protection never love again and longing to love unconditionally shattered one "shell" but another came through closing and opening

TABLE 3

First Order Themes Paraphrased: Elizabeth

Theme	Paraphrase
anger	it protected me
	constructive in solving problems
	shifted my priorities
	crystallized a view to act
	a signal that change was necessary
emotional detachment	even when being beaten can not be touched
	saw my depths, calmly knew I could kill
	seems scary but is reassuring thing to know
sexual pleasure marriage	confused early messages about sex, was safe but sex was not
	physical pleasure has risk and danger
	sex only safe in intimate relationship
	hard work more important and safer than pleasure
self-control	childhood lesson to hold emotions in
	to put on a face that everything was wonderful
	to look perfect
	control feelings
	can not talk openly
lessons learned	"things I thought were secure weren't"
	"it is a safety thing to talk to someone"
	own my mistakes
	will make mistakes
	I am responsible but not always in control
	there are patterns in life
	see love differently
	a relief to know I make mistakes
	try to predict positive outcomes but can not control them
	do not have to pretend I am perfect
	to be able to ask for help

Table 3 (continues)

TABLE 3 (continued)

First Order Themes Paraphrased: Elizabeth

Theme	Paraphrase
lessons learned	I know when things are not my fault reading books make me feel safe playing the piano makes me feel safe
strength in values	safer to embrace life need to hold values that stand the test of time money does not have highest value sharing what I have is important honest authentic relationships are critical can not project an "image" love of people joy in life
trust	"loss of trust was like a moulting, to get a new skin, it is a wonderful full circle" safer to be vulnerable so something deeper can develop faith in people can still take risks but have retreated from men, they have to show me, don't take things at face value, more critical, cautious shift in perception of trust was a gift
optimism	safe to be vulnerable plans for the future, education, career, travel I have choices I can touch somebody, make a difference, influence positive change confidence that I can survive
knowing	I am my own expert humbled by knowing I have lots to learn trust my own knowledge (intuition) over the voice of authority (male)

Table 3 (continues)

TABLE 3 (continued)

First Order Themes Paraphrased: Elizabeth

Theme	Paraphrase
knowing	know I have choices
	know that people can be cruel
	know I can rely on my parents
	know I can touch somebody
	I think from a "feelings" perspective
	friends are necessary but not essential
	support is important but I can act alone
	once I feel secure and empowered I can be concerned about others and the human condition
	have to work on not fooling myself about who I am
	I must stay connected to my feelings
spiritual beliefs	I am not alone
	there is a higher power
	life has meaning and purpose
	life is full of wonder
	belief in forgiveness
	responsibility to give back and recognition of the privilege to be able to do so
alive and aware	see bigger picture
	men are tragic figures because they close out emotions, don't talk and need to control
	belief in self
	need for community
	aware of internal attractiveness as more important than external beauty
	life is worth living
disillusion	hurt and disappointed by social institutions of church, hospital, police
	social agencies do not protect
	humiliation result of seeking help from strangers (police, doctor)

Table 3 (continues)

TABLE 3 (continued)

First Order Themes Paraphrased: Elizabeth

Theme	Paraphrase
power	inspired by those who show power in their nakedness, do not cover blemishes inspired by those who do not pretend they do not have power women can be strong
desire	to be tough but touched by pain to be in touch with feelings of compassion and anger to influence positive change in the community to keep son safe
others	to be moved by the continuous efforts of who push through the pain and keep trying to be resilient

Second Order Thematic Analysis

After a first order thematic analysis of all the transcripts for each participant, a second order thematic analysis was undertaken. This involved clustering first order themes into either more general themes shared by most of the participants, including those themes that could only be expressed as higher order constructs (themes that have risen above the particulars of each woman's story). This analysis represents the researcher's interpretation of the meaning that rose up out of the text. A brief description with each of the second order themes follows.

Safety Is a State of Mind

Safety is a space or place that she goes to in her own mind. A state of being that encourages her to feel secure and out of harm's way. Sometimes it is an imagined place with music, comforting landscape, and remembered childhood pleasures. Other times, it is a place carved out with grim resolve, careful planning and watchful nurturing. It is her inner core. It is an internal state, freeing her from the vagaries of the external world. Such thoughts and feelings may be conjured up at will, giving her a sense of detachment from the outside world. No one else can touch the "place." It is also a state that can be elusive, sometimes she can not trust herself to get "there" when she wants to leave the moment at hand. What it takes to get there may take time to arrange. When she is there she can see herself and knows she exists. Nothing is there but a presence is felt.

Safety Is Born in Childhood

The safe state, those moments of pure joy, those experiences of innocent trust in the nature of the people around her was first felt, heard, tasted, touched within her childhood home. Memories of the ways of parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters shaped her imaginings of a sense of safety. As a young girl she was told that if she obeyed the rules, believed the carefully crafted family stories, and adopted the roles she was born to embrace, she would be protected, approved of, taken care of, and eventually provided for by a husband. Her polite obedience would earn her safety in the

privacy of her home and protect her from the harsh outside world. Yet, even "doing as she was told" put her at risk as a youngster in her home, she was hurt to discover the contradictions, the secrets, the surprises. The safe feeling is still strengthened and threatened in the remembering. The ever-present longing for a safe "home" is retrievable and just beyond her grasp. In any case, there is a childlike, innate "knowing" about its essence, impossible to completely articulate, yet most palpable and knowable throughout her life.

Safety is a Voice - A Call to Action

The state of safety is experienced when she takes control of her choices, makes her own decisions, manages and organizes what she needs in her home, her work and her community. Feeling in control comes from acquiring new information that helps explain her feelings, helps handle her anxieties, changes her beliefs. It comes from experiencing success in stopping the violence, removing herself from the abuse, taking charge, acting not waiting for someone to protect her. Feeling safer slips in almost unnoticed when she finds herself deciding when to say yes and when to say no. She sees that she can count on herself to pay attention, to protect her children, to seek respite. Gaining control may come from conversations with someone who understands, taking physical shelter until new arrangements can be made, and in lonely self-reflection, but mostly it comes from taking a risk. She knew what it felt like to be out of control, betrayed by her body, silent, lost to herself. Practicing self-control, a hard earned competence, sometimes crystallized by

anger, does not always result in predictable outcomes. But there is a security, a state of mind, that is embodied in the "act." She learns to listen and act on the physical messages that persist. Taking control improves her sense of physical well-being, creates a safe place.

Safety Offers a Mirror

Finding the state of mind that comforts, that feels safe, even in the crisis, stills the waters. She catches her reflection rippling in a deep pool. She cannot continue, then the surface clears, slowly she wades into painful self-assessment of her past - why did she ignore, pretend, keep silent, run away, withdraw and deceive? She takes stock of her strengths and resources, even finding that anger softens the hard edge of deep sadness. Having survived real danger, new awakenings are stirred, change is afoot. Old beliefs are challenged, loss is examined, grief is allowed, contradictions are reframed, new questions are asked about what it means to be human, to be a woman, a mother, a sister, a friend, a daughter, a wife. She tries to take responsibility for who she is and what she does, knowing that many things are not her fault and sometimes, mistakes will be made. She can no longer pretend. Old mirrors are shattered, she sees new patterns and appreciates real activities that feel safe; a book, music, honest conversation, a long walk. Gradually she feels different, she likes who she sees. At times she has only a fleeting glance, a half-shaped reflection, but it has form. She can imagine, without fear, standing alone - alive and aware. A bigger picture of her world emerges in the glass.

Safety Feeds the Human Spirit

Disillusioned by cruelty, aware of the oppressive banality of violence, wearied by the sheer conditions of poverty, experienced in the systemic nature of abuse and indifference, she sees it and sees through it. She knows what she has lost and gained, and hungers for inspiration. She is inspired by any resolve to stay safe. Finding herself in a safer place, her human spirit is nurtured. Guided by an intuition and in a circle with others, she can participate in her chosen community with renewed hope and sense of purpose. Once lost and alone, she offers to share what she has created, a safer place for others to rest. Forgiveness opens her to deeper understanding. She yearns to be tough but touched by pain. It is a sign to remember to feel. A new mix of personal and spiritual connection is stirring and a shift in power is brewing. She has an appetite for clear values and an ethic of care, enough optimism to fill her days with giving and getting. She has new food for thought.

Safety is a Voice: A Different Authority

Moving beyond the dangers of living with a violent partner and taking risks to be safer taught many lessons. She becomes the author of her own stories. In moments of safety she has time to study the face of abuse, to compare and contrast. Safer places, safer relationships, safer bodies opened up time to hear the echoes from the past. She learns to be watchful, to take many jobs while raising children, to create a safe home, to get more education, to keep moving or to settle into one neighborhood and to sort out the

contradictions that matter. She learns to talk to others, to ask and accept help when needed, to express her feelings and ideas, and sometimes, to risk greater openness to become more vulnerable, to love again. Lessons sadly written into her book of knowledge. Lessons she hopes to teach her children. This is her knowledge - how she works in her world. It is a loud and soft voice, but it speaks with authority.

Final Order Thematic Analysis

At this stage of thematic analysis, second order themes were clustered into what might be considered the essential themes. One would look for these themes in all the women's conversations about the nature of safety. From the total group of individual textural descriptions the invariant meanings and themes of every participant are studied in depicting the experience of the group as a whole (Moustakas, 1994). The meaning of the experience rests in these themes. It is at this point that one is able to say "that" is her understanding of safety and "that" is not. To achieve this implied that the researcher was able to distinguish from the innumerable variations within and between themes, which is which.

Three major themes were interpreted: What safe was -the child recalls; Taking up a safer "place" - the double bind; What it will take to stay safer - you can't take that away from me.

Developing a Description

In the phenomenological tradition the final order themes are often presented as a description of the experience. In describing the experience, the research attempts to capture the essence of the phenomenon. It is at this point that the interpretation must stand on its own and be accepted or rejected. The following chapter is a narrative description of the women's understanding of the nature of safety, were experiences that shared a common ground for all had experienced abuse from their husbands.

CHAPTER SIX

THE NATURE OF SAFETY

This description is presented in narrative form. Headings are used to accentuate themes or groupings of themes as interpreted from the first, second and final order analysis. The code for each quote will identify the Session, Tape number, and Page number for each woman's text.

What Was It - The Child Recalls

Thinking about the family I have come from

To explain such a commonplace notion as "safe" actually seemed so complex that it was a curiosity, a challenge - where to start, how best to start talking? We knew that we had not always felt safe but what was that feeling, where did it come from, what happened when we were safe, how did we know the feeling was there? The women expressed similar sentiments about ways to begin the conversation, compelled to start by sharing some of their earliest memories as little girls at home. The idea of home was sometimes contrasted with "house," the home signifying "secure, safety, warm fuzzy feelings," was how Sarah distinguished it, and she went on to say:

> In my house, growing up, I always felt safe..it was wonderful I think I grew up with the best family in the world even though my dad was an alcoholic..I didn't know that till I was about twenty-three so obviously it didn't impact on my life as a child....I even remember as a teenager turning down baby-sitting jobs because I wanted to be home on Friday nights, on Saturday nights with my family. It was always really important to me and ..a.. having them around was just a really good feeling I even..can't put another adjective to it... S1, T1, P8-9

Althea was reminded of very specific, brief and fleeting moments of feeling safe, but only as a backdrop to her first memories of real fear, when she was still very young:

> No, but interestingly enough I think what comes to mind is the house where we were when I was five. I was safe, and we would go to the cottage in the summer, and there was water all around and I was so safe. And so many friends swimming, and we didn't know the city in the summer....so I had five summers up there and it was heaven...heaven... girlfriends, they are long gone..but the family unit...my brothers and sisters, my parents were safe when I was home, and so one time when I was very young, five or six, or seven, my brother went missing, we couldn't find him...
> S1, T1, P1-2

Althea pondered that moment, as it only helped to pinpoint the fear-filled awareness she recalled as she and her cousin searched the neighborhood for her lost younger brother:

> I realized that nobody cared..they really didn't care...No we haven't ...Slam the door.. No we haven't...slam the door...and I think that was my very first reality, the fact that if you had a family you were safe. ..but nobody else really wanted to know you if you had trouble.
> S1, T1, P2

Telling the story brought a flood of other memories and some tears which led, Althea, like many of us, to ask a poignant question:

> when did I get to have a childhood?..my mother's right hand girl...there were six of us...and I took care of the other brothers, I took care of the mother and father, and I took care of the younger three...and I can remember at thirteen having an entire house to clean....I felt overburdened. S1, T1, P5

Elizabeth remembered a childhood of love and safety but one she

believed to be somewhat different from most:

> ...because my life for much of it was lived in kind of a fish bowl - being a minister's daughter - and ..um.. I was always conscious from a very early age of being...the place that I was safe, was within myself..that there was a kind of unspoken expectation of me to always present the persona of always being in control - everything was perfect, you know and you succeeded at a lot of things. .....and when I was young, like elementary school, and stuff, I think for the most part my life was um, safe to a certain degree except that the safest that I felt was with my grandma..... I could talk to her and so for me, she was really a safe place. S1, T1, P1

Just as each childhood varied, the mothers and fathers in each family were unique, but there seemed to be some common elements learned. It was important to believe that the father was the one who would keep the family and home safe and happy, and it was he that the daughter tried to trust and please. Althea used to repeat to herself, especially if she was tired and scared of doing as she was told - like a mantra:

> Daddy would take care of us...no matter what...Daddy would take care of us.... S1, T1, P5

Elizabeth characterized her relationship with and respect for her father as critical to the principles she embraces today:

> I would always kind of, I suppose had a kind of idolized relationship with my father. He and I have always had a very close relationship, and we have lots of fun together...he did protect me. S1, T1, P4

Sarah explained that because her father had to be away from the home to do his job, she had an extra role:

> maybe it's being the eldest in the family ... um..my dad was gone Monday to Friday travelling, so mum was all alone, I don't think she put any extra pressure on me most of the stuff I do is self

> imposed um...safeguarding..watching out of the corner of my eye... S1, T1, P12-13

All the women were puzzled by their mothers' important but confusing roles in creating their childhood home. These women were seen as hard working, long-suffering, often burdened by the demands of their husbands' work or behavior, and, it seemed, often, women misunderstood by the young girls looking on. Compassion often not felt until later adulthood. Sarah had great admiration for an amazing mother whom she, only later, realized had not felt safe herself:

> No from talking to her now for about.. from about the time I was twelve on she was going through the same things I was going through but she never left um..
> I never noticed it, either I was up in clouds or she kept us apart from that very very well....
> she kept us away from it very very well she's a very strong woman um..
> I remember feeling safe absolutely wonderful it was absolutely wonderful um..
> that nothing could touch me that I was invincible not in an egotistical way just nothing could touch me as long as I was in my house with my people that I loved a... S1, T1, P8-9

Elizabeth put it another way:

> It is funny because I never had the same sense about my mother..um... but I understand now that I am older, some of those things she was dealing with...but at the time, I was very judgmental about it. And I never really understood how difficult her role really was .....
> we were never able to have fun, because there was always this image to uphold. S1, T1, P4

In Althea's memory, although her dad paid for things, her mother did not always take care of things:

> Daddy would take care of us....I mean financially. For instance...I would do all the Christmas shopping...all the Christmas shopping... my mother inevitably would get the flu, and go down at Christmas... she could not handle it.... too emotional... S1, T1, P5

If I could just make it better

As little girls they remembered being worried about the safety of others, feeling the need to protect their brothers and sisters, sometimes even their parents, from knowing things or doing things that might hurt them. Whatever the family situation, each shared an understanding of the very nature of a home and family as essential to their earliest moments of safety. Feeling safe was not just about themselves, however, they definitely wanted to be sure it was safer for those they loved. It seemed that, quite early in their lives, they felt the worry, the capacity and the need to take on such responsibilities. Sarah described it well, giving virtually the same examples as Elizabeth and Althea:

> watching out of the corner of my eye this is the only concrete example I can think of.... for a bad guy coming around the corner to grab my sister or my brothers..um..making sure they didn't go in the street because they might get hit by a car...um..and again it was not because my mum told me to do those things I just felt I had a need to do them a ... S1, T1, P13

Trying to fit in

As the conversations continued, the woman remembered more about their lives as children struggling in the ever bigger world. Each described the threats, the fears, the places in which they did not feel that they fit in outside the family. At times feeling misunderstood, stupid and humiliated, or different from

their peers, they mused over the way things kept shifting. Listen to Sarah:

> Through my whole life ..well pre-twenty..not just as a teenager, I think a lot of teenagers go through that typically that they don't fit, but I didn't fit in Grade 1 either...(big sigh)
> nobody thought the same way I did or thought of the same things maybe that's why I'm in this field... I was into social justice in Grade 1 (laughter)... my mother even verifies that and other people were into..I don't know...Jell-O for supper...I always found other kids to be too...they didn't care about the right things...
> ....no well I have a sister eleven months younger and I have always been protective of her but it wasn't just her I was protective of the underdog ..a a a
> all the time and very concerned about Kruschev and Communism in grade ..that would have been kindergarten... S1, T1, P10-11

Elizabeth recalled:

> my teens being a very terrible time in my life....um the shock was just incredible going from elementary to junior high, because I wasn't the top of the heap anymore. I had to compete with lots of people who were far more capable in lots of ways than I was, and I had always been used to being on top, and it was a real shock. Plus, going through all of the hormonal things that you go through when you are thirteen...I started my period I think when I was thirteen. I thought I had cancer. I didn't know anything about it. I remember at that particular time, there were ads on TV about the signs to watch for if you had cancer, and any unusual bleeding or discharge was one of the signs, and I was sure I was dying. And it was my dad who went out and got my pads and a belt.....you remember those terrible belts? S1, T1, P6

Althea, not only saw herself as an outcast child (Cinderella) trying to make it perfect by cleaning and looking after the other children, but recounted specific memories of working at her first job in her father's business:

> but it brought back that memory of that Sunday...in that office when everybody was at home resting, and relaxing...and I was treated differently...I was out there working... S2, T1, P3

Sliding out of this reality

It was apparent that to explore the nature of safety, resulted in compelling conversations about childhood, rich and profoundly important to what unfolded later in the lives of the women. Even when it felt turbulent, the memories tumbled out, and the stories had everything to do with another important phenomenon that each woman spent much time explaining. With each woman, there was a clear if inarticulate understanding that, to feel safe she must "go" to the safe place in her head and that is what she learned to do early in her life. It was not that she could go to a person, or to a physical place to seek comfort, but that she could go to some other place internally, into her imagination, where she felt the presence of "something" safer, no matter what else was going on around her.

Sarah struggled to express her earliest experiences with this happily remembered gift, a talent that even her mother witnessed:

> I'm just trying to think about what's mine and what my mother told me about growing up, she didn't understand me, as a child. She said I was always somewhere else and real happy...
> where my sister was very much a grounds person and not very happy..mum...had to tell me she was my ground and, she was, I don't know where I'd be without her, but I was always again mentally someplace else and happy.
> ...mostly it was to imagine, not that I wasn't aware of what was going on, but give me a piece of gauze or fluffy material and I could entertain myself for hours in my room... I was a princess... I was a ...big imaginary..
> but it wasn't really escape, slide is a much better word... cause I wasn't escaping from anything.... I just knew if I didn't like it here I had someplace else to go and that worked well through school

> through college through long plane rides... it's nice to go someplace else. S1, T1, P13-14

As Elizabeth recalled earlier in the narrative:

> I was very conscious at a very early age of being....the place that I was safe, was within myself. S1, T1, P1

Althea, recounted her way of escaping the dangerous fights of her parents,her well-orchestrated capacity to get inside her head, out of harm's way, a trick she would practice for many years:

> Now I can ramble right into...I can take that train of thought and ramble right into the fact that door frames used to be off in some houses, and they would have a fight...I can remember the rum bottles down in behind the canned vegetables...
> ...so I did a lot of fantasizing....
> When they were out of the house, and I was cleaning it from top to bottom...a little Cinderella girl you know...
> ...I would scour and scrub that bathtub ... I would make the tiles shine... and I would go and I would take out the music ... "Camelot" .... "South Pacific".... "My Fair Lady" ... I can sing you just about every lyric to every song ever written, and they called me a cockeyed optimist...[a line from "South Pacific"] But I don' know ... that is what I needed, and that is what I did.
> ..and then I would dance and sing and I would be on the stage...singing these things to the world.... S1, T1, P6

They told me that....

Their memories of life with parents and siblings reflected stories of love, joy, tension, fantasy, pain, change, struggles, including the repeated promise of protection. A good provider was desirable and possible, especially if she was a "good girl." Even as she watched contradictions taking place, carefully crafted ideals were prescribed by mothers, fathers, grandparents, the movies, the magazines and the television. There were details to the image "they" expected

her to adopt - she had to portray herself as quietly obedient, charming and polite, cheerful and accepting of what was offered, intelligently conversant about the world around her and attractive in appearance. The most valued qualities would result in the highest of achievements - a good husband, a clean well-cared for home, healthy children, living happily ever after. While the girl listened to all these messages, growing up as she did in Canada in the 1950s and 1960s, there were many things that were never talked about, things she wished she had been told about her body, about sex, about men, things that, although carefully avoided, seemed directly related to achieving the goals of all good girls. Elizabeth remarked on the effect of the multiple examples of an unquestioned "good girl" image:

> I think that was a very controlling mechanism...you know in my upbringing...you know ... the "good girl" thing...
> tied to intimacy. I think my release for that was the physical things that I did...I loved horses and spend a lot of time at the stables.....I never had any difficulties there, but my mother was terrified for me there..good girls don't do that ...you know...
> S3, T1, P4

Further in the conversation she remembered:

> he...was far more experienced than I ...I did not know anything about anything...I was really naive about it...I think as a matter of fact the only thing ...dad had given me a book when I had started my period and I think that was the only things I had ever seen...It wasn't talked about.. S3, T1, P6

She recounted that it was expected that her first husband would be more experienced than she, even though they were virtually the same age.

> Now how the logic of that came about is beyond me.... but being a good provider seemed to be the excuse for men to be ... they could be pills in lots of other areas of their life, but as long as they were good providers and had a good roof over your head and food on the table...and children...
> Well I think it is the good girl thing again...woman don't have the same kind of sexual drive as men..which I think is a bunch of hooey....women can have just as much pleasure in sex as men can... S5, T1, P10-11

Sarah recalled different messages at different times in her life, but particularly remembered how the ideas of safety and control where struggling to find influence in her destiny:

> You grew up at the same time I did....you were supposed to wear the dress with the starched apron and mop the floors at the same time, and be home and do those things.. and I got into that...
> It is not so much if you did those things you would be safe...it is if you did not you would not be safe...so its the reverse. It is not there was safety in doing that it was just ...the other...there was nothing ...it was a void...it was black....and nobody did that.
> S2, T1, P4

Indeed, each woman recounted experiences that reflected the acceptance of the spoken and unspoken, the surprises, and the black void that must be avoided. As Sarah saw it there was also something positive and ideal about such a dream, a choice she made for herself at one point:

> That your future included three possible careers...secretary, teacher, that you get married, you have children, you stay home and you die...eventually ....happily ...safely after the emptiness...ya happily and safely and protected by a husband or.. S2, T1, P7

Althea, too, was brought up not to question the importance of finding the right man, unable to talk to her mother about her beatings. Wishing, perhaps, that she had the tools to figure out what had happened with her parents, rather

than being stuck with the compulsion to run, looking for the next romantic movie plot, she remarked that she was:

> ...groomed ... to grow up and get married as so many of us were..and ..ah...to be a good little girl...but when I got off the leash..I love that expression...I went off to England .. S1, T1, P7

Taking Up a Safer Place - The Double Bind

Life gets messier

Embracing life as young women, they soon fell in love and married. Each had two children. They thought they were taking up their rightful place - theirs to preserve and enjoy. They tried hard, submitted to the roles they were groomed for, and then as Elizabeth pointed out:

> And um, and so, the things that I had thought were the secure things.... weren't... my relationship with [husband].... and my relationship with my children... but I have always felt like the rug can be ripped out from under me at any time. S1, T1, P3

Untangling the woven threads of memories and feelings of the past gave the women the perspective they wanted. The background was spread out, the foreground could then be filled in with the material of their adult lives. The stories of each woman contributed metaphors, notions, voices and images, tools we used to compare, contrast, contradict and assign value to the essential notions of safety. We touched the weave of the fabric of their lives and we speculated on what shaped the patterns. We had created a magnifying glass to look at the texture of the "cloth." As Elizabeth commented, staring at

the many pages of text from the last three interviews:

> .... to read about your life and to feel good about some parts of it and to be kind of awakened in other areas you know, it is really quite an experience.
> .... just from my own insight.... into having been able to participate in this... that it is a powerful tool, you know... to um...
>
> be able to read what you have said and then reflect on that... S4,T1, P2

The way in which the women took the time to think about safety gave them the sense of a safer place from which to reflect on the times in their marriages that were abusive, dangerous, painful and lonely. Sarah reflected:

> and now that you mention that too...an interesting thought...I just thought a lot of my boundaries within my marriage and what I would take as far as verbal abuse, or trying to smooth things over at all costs, not trying to rock the boat, not make waves were the same boundaries that my mother set for herself in her marriage with my father ...
> ....would have to interpret to know...even though you are saying this...this is what you really mean...I hope... because if I am wrong, then there is going to be yelling or jumping up and down or something... um holding your tongue when you shouldn't have to...which is not getting angry. Trying to say the right thing at the right time...and this isn't all the time. Obviously someone can't live this way all of the time... um... giving up some of your own immediate expectations, like I want to go to a movie now, or something... always giving into what the other person wants, because it is just easier... than trying to fight for what you want... Like I say... things as simple as going to a movie, to buying a house ... to having children. S2, T1, P21

By describing the events of those times, they could pause to characterize what they had gone through and explain what had to be done to change. To get to that safer place in her head, a state of mind that could separate her from the

emotional abuse, Sarah recalled her first decision:

> I didn't feel physically unsafe but it was each time it happened it was a little bit, I had to realize that I had to rely more on me and less on him if this marriage is going to work..um...its not meeting the expectations that I thought it would and even though I knew that it wasn't the norm for marriage. I don't make commitments lightly, so its my role, we'll just have a slightly different kind of marriage...and I'll be more isolated and I'll work on the relationship if he's not willing to. S1, T1, P22

The women shared the view that safety was not so much a physical concern but rather an internal "place" and that their need to be safe there was a driving force, guiding actions not only in the crises but in the aftermath. It seemed that they where not creating safety **from** something, but rather building something to bring their children towards. Each mother was passionate about keeping her children safe. Elizabeth said:

> and so there was lots of emotional things that I was dealing with around that, and trying to keep my family safe was very important....I was far more focused on them than myself..... S1, T1, P12

Sarah described the struggle to figure out what it would take to build that safer place, knowing it would take more than money:

> I was thinking, no, I can do this myself, but it wasn't allowed. Part of that was myself, not allowing myself... But whenever ... well first of all I couldn't get a high paying job, I didn't have the experience or the education to do that ... but the jobs that I did get, I think I explained this the first time, that just allowed him more money for drinking... It didn't increase our financial... or if I didn't work ... I still had the same amount of money .. so why leave [the baby] alone when I can stay home and be just as poor if I go out to work all day and be poor. S1, T2, P28

Each woman had to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of leaving the man she had married. Pretending everything would be all right or shattering the myth, as Sarah put it:

> the whole myth of ... leaning on a husband ... leaning on a male... and that was all shattered at the same time as well. S5, T1, P4

They knew they were at risk of losing the self, self-esteem was eroding, loneliness was grinding, and exhaustion was depressing. Sarah spoke as if for the other two when she said she felt like she was dying, she had no life, "her inner core was bruised." Reclaiming or finding that inner place, each woman had ways of saying that she just had to create that safety on her own. As Althea, the most recent to leave her home, remarked:

> My mindset is different. I am in the process of taking control of specific areas of my life that I have always allowed to be controlled by others..that is frightening... and I am trying to do too much, too soon ... S5, T1, P9

Taking the steps to make a safer place, however, meant confronting more fears, continued loneliness, insecurity - not moving into immediate physical comfort or security, facing humiliation, criticism and guilt. Not much understanding, approval or helpful information was readily available. This was the double bind. I felt contradictory - I can't feel safe to get safe. Making such an important decision was supposed to improve her life. Listening to Sarah it was possible to feel the stress:

> It was... just that... the door locking behind me... just closing the door.. it took a lot more than that... I unpacked and packed that stupid truck for days, before I actually left... I guess I was going to

> this big black void... thanks to our wonderful system... that wouldn't tell me what I could get for help... or what that big black void would look like...
>
> Ya... getting to safe meant going into something even more unsafe. S2, T2, P44

Can the power of imagination rescue me....?

Recognizing the complexity of a life alone with children, taking stock of her skills and resources, knowing it got worse before it got better, she had to reach out, take action, believe in the power of her imagination. She took strength from images that would fuel her resolve. She could no longer pretend that it was going to get better without her insistence. Could she imagine a better, safer life? That inner place, somewhat hidden by the shadows of a marriage, had to be reclaimed and re-imagined. Sarah remembered those early moves:

> Not having any emotional ties, it was easier to be assertive... so going to the lawyer.. or to legal aid, and demanding some assistance to get interim custody of my children... not that that required a lot of assertiveness, but for me it did...for somebody who had lived by herself for so long... it required talking to people... that was assertive unto itself!!
> ...and thank goodness for the [shelter] ...they were wonderful...they didn't really put the pieces together for me, but... I never really talked to anybody but they were there.
> What I liked about the shelter ...you couldn't pretend...the safety there was the fact that everyone there was in the same boat... so you didn't have to pretend....no Donna Reed in the next room!
> S2, T1, P48

Althea, still struggled with the actions she took to get to a shelter, but found that she had to:

> Number one ... you have to know how to forgive yourself if you have made a mistake...and until you know how to do that you will never get out and that is how I got out... I forgave me... and then you have to be prepared to get off your ass and do something about it... I learned that... S5, T1, P44

The women found resolve in taking some respite, in finding a "safety net" as they put it, that said she was worthy. Anger also motivated and protected. Elizabeth explained the crystallization of her new image in the wake of her crisis. Harsh words spoken by a loving father had found its mark:

> Because I remember coming back to [city], and my parents being devastated at the state I was in. That I had lost all of this money, and my dad saying to me "we are not going to make any more mistakes are we?"
> But the message from my father at that time, was that I had made all these terrible mistakes. I had made some bad judgments, there is no question about that. S1, T1, P17

Her father's question marked a very significant juncture in her life, sharpening a new facet in her image:

> I think if my dad hadn't said those words to me...I think they were very critical, because I think then it really... I think that was the moment of my adulthood. S1, T2, P35

By owning their successes and failures, taking control, reflecting on the past, relying on well-established abilities, making new connections, different roles were adopted to fill in the fading images formerly held. She began to believe that she mattered. They carved bigger pictures of themselves in the world. They compared snapshots of their past and present lives. Their new pictures jarred with observations of the pervasive violence in both the public

and private worlds. Sarah described her view:

> ...if I read the paper every day which I don't...I am sure there is at least six articles every day ...that the language ... the content... or something offends me and makes me want to scream... you don't get it?! S5, T2, P68

I learned that...

They all spoke of lessons learned, Sarah drew some conclusions about her former loss of identity and how that shaped the present image;

> I think that is something I did in my twenties...but it is not something I do now....I think I know myself...I think I know who I am and am very comfortable with who I am.. but I can still "shape shift"...you know...if you are a triangle...I will be a triangle... I will just wrap myself around your space and become part of that space to make you feel comfortable... S3, T1, P17

The women clarified the presence of that state of mind - safety. They described what it took to get there. Sarah remembered her return to the home she had fled. She only wanted take the basics to start a new home for her children:

> RCMP kept saying... get a lawyer's court order...and it was Sunday afternoon... and I said I can't do that until Monday... and they said "oh well"...
> so he [husband] had the auctioneers in on Sunday and they bought everything in our house....
> so when I went back on Monday ... there was a bag of frozen peas strewn across the kitchen and this echo ... everything was gone. S4, T2, P64

Further in this conversation she added:

> so my experience made me aware and with that awareness came ... slowly ... an understanding of what needed to be done for myself first ... and then for others .. S5, T1, P23

They had to lead different lives, had to grieve and survive tremendous loss, face poverty and stand alone, sometimes with others close by, not sure about the future. Acting, changing, moving on, however, meant resolve and self-reflection. Elizabeth described many of the lessons expressed by the others and summed it up with:

> and I think that safety for me comes in ... in...knowing who I am... and um..that a relationship can have its dysfunction or it unhealthiness, but I don't necessarily have to be ill to be part of it ... I don't have to accept it... I can leave or choose to do something else... I have some control about that.
> But I couldn't be ruled by what was concerning them [her parents] any longer ... and in a way... I think I divorced myself of the need for their approval...Like ..its nice if they approve, but it is not essential. S3, T1, P36

The lessons engaged them in new resolve. They were not finished as Elizabeth joked:

> And I am glad I am not fully baked. If I was fully baked then I wouldn't know what to do with the rest of my life. I think life is the baking process you know... S5, T1, P25

They spoke of trying to stay vigilant. Speaking of the present now, they longed to hold on to their hard - won knowledge, trust their feelings, listen to the authority of their own voice, maintain the effort to be safer, imagining a future. Sarah spoke with yearning:

> I am not sure, but I still get confused, because I lived more years

> in the myth than out of the myth ...the myth still creeps back...and is it me ... or...what?
> I need that affirmation. S5, T1, P24

As the narrative progressed, the interviews continued, the essence of the past stories foreshadowed the women's present stories of hope, optimism, and connections to the mystery of the human spirit.

What It Will Take To Stay Here - You Can't Take That Away From Me

And then there was hope

Describing themselves as more comfortable in their own skin, it was apparent that a clearer identity gave the women more space for hope to rise out of the depths of their experience. The essence of this part of the narrative shifted. The women had turned their minds to the future. Elizabeth spoke of her intentions that expressed her hopes for future knowledge:

> But also ... it humbles you .. also in terms of your honesty with yourself ... about who you are ... because if you feel you are an expert on yourself ... one of the things that this process has done is made me realize that I know certain things that I know ... but I also know that I have a lot to learn ... and that I want to learn this... it is really in a search ... for a knowledge ... because I think that we are very complex people... all of us and um ...
> and that there are ... facets of ourselves that we really never have the opportunity ... or take the opportunity to explore ... and I think that there is a comfortableness now within myself about who I am ... that makes me think that life is too darn short ... you know ... and that there isn't enough time to do all the things that I want to be able to do ... S4, T1, P18

Sarah put it this way:

> No! No! That is exactly it. The one side of it is grief...feelings of having lost and shattered something and on the other side ... the kind of opening and awakening ... awareness that has potential to

> be exciting and offer optimism to the future ... which was ... just one more little chance to make things exciting.... S5, T1, P7

They recounted the successes they have experienced in creating a home that is safer, stable, organized and managed with love and attention to detail. Other relationships have given the women hope about the possibility of feeling safe enough to be vulnerable. Sarah considered this issue:

> so I think what I am trying to figure out now is balance ... I am not going to be a doormat ...but at the same time I should be able to do what I want to do, but still maintain that um... reciprocal ... relying on each other relationship ... S5, T1, P5

In the same vein, Elizabeth spoke with enthusiasm many different times in the conversation:

> I love people and I need people in my life. But I also can be at times, very much a loner, and very single minded in terms of what I want to do, or what I need to do.
> ... because in spite of the close intimate relationships... that I have had that weren't safe ... there were other relationships at the same time ... as those... that were safe... and so I haven't ever had the perception that being in a relationship is an unsafe thing...
> I guess what I know is that I do feel safe now ... and um ...that doesn't mean that I don't sometimes feel vulnerable.
> S1, T1, P17-18

Althea, not so distant from the abusive experience, described her risk to make changes with a glimmer of optimism:

> but I feel I am in the process of getting extricated from it and it is tricky and it is sticky, it is like molasses in January ... you know ... but I won't quit .. I have two beautiful children and my own life.
> S5, T1, P52

And then there was love

Each woman spoke of hope and optimism grounded in personal values.

Beliefs that were tested but survived, as Elizabeth saw it:

> ...having a security in the values that I hold... that get tested over time....Money for me ... um ... especially for me in this stage of my life when I am almost fifty... if my health is good I can continue to work.. um .. but I have shared a lot of what I have had materially ..with lots of different people, and I haven't really focused very much on my future... in terms of some financial planning... but money to me has never really been a critical issue... to me it is more in the relationships and it is in my understanding of what I am doing and who I am...given me a sense of security. S3, T1, P29-30

Their values have been held as essential to their identities as spiritual women. Women who, as Elizabeth put it, believe in the human spirit and in the importance of connection with other people. All three discussed their connection with a church, a community of people and a faith in a higher power that offered hope and redemption. Elizabeth said:

> Yes. I think generally I am very optimistic ... I believe in the human spirit somehow and I think we go through these dips and peaks and valleys and stuff um... I believe generally in the goodness of people, and that may be very naive, but even in the worst of times... people can demonstrate tremendous capacity for humanness and um ... I believe in that and that is what gives me hope...
> I mean it really has to just start with myself... and hopefully that will grow... that you touch somebody.... S5, T1, P13

Part of how Sarah defined herself included her connection with her church community and in her efforts to offer her home as a safe refuge for young people she met through these commitments:

> giving of myself...giving of myself because I enjoy doing it. I don't expect anything in return .. um ..
> I think I hope through giving of myself .. my time, my thoughts...

> whatever it is I can do for someone .. may mold to something larger ... S7, T1, P18

Further thoughts about her call to such actions led her to ponder how she characterized her beliefs, her outlook on life:

> ...just don't believe that there is evil in people. Now even though I know there is evil in people ... this is how I am trying to define myself... I realize that there is the potential for evil, but my first impulse is to ignore that .. to deny that is there so when I meet someone... um..
> I choose to believe there is no evil ... that everyone is good ... everyone thinks like I do ... and that is not true ... but that is the way I want to look at people ... I don't want to look at people differently than that... S7, T1, P19-20

Althea recalled her compulsion to go to a church while she was at a shelter, it connected her to her mother's past and to her own need:

> I have a very firm belief in this whole thing...so it works for me ... my spirituality ... ah .. I haven't attended church every day or even every Sunday, but gosh I have been praying like a trooper...it works for me. It has gotten me through. S5, T1, P46

And you can't take that away from me

A sense of worthiness, a belief in the goodness of people, a faith in the possibility of forgiveness and redemption, and the energy created by human connections resonated throughout the last repeated theme. The intractability of this safer state of mind - this regenerated state of being - was palpable. The "place" will not be given over, given up, taken away. Each woman clearly expressed her impatience with living by anything less than safer rules, as Elizabeth stated:

> Well I think that... you know ... the role, the "you should"...roles and

> "you must"...roles ...and all of those kind of things ..that are foisted on us as woman..I could not do that very well, and the uncomfortableness about that came through some of the experiences in my life so... I find it difficult not to be real...if something like that is happening, I find that ...I find it hard not to say something about that or to extricate myself from the situation or whatever...I am not willing to play that game... I tend to say what I feel about it, and I am quite prepared to be rejected by that but I am also far more willing to risk saying things about that too.. S5, T1, P24

At another point in the conversation, Elizabeth echoed the voices of the women when she said:

> ...there are certain things that I can not compromise on ... and I am not willing to compromise on ... and that if I am in situations where that is called for, and I cannot do it..I just cannot do it ... and so I have to do something... and generally that has meant taking what appears maybe to other people... to be a risky step... but for me ... it is a safety step... Believe me... it is. S4, T1, P23

Sarah weighed out those values that have kept her close to her experiences and cautioned her in struggling to feel safe:

> to not let it happen again, or to be aware that it can happen again... and to help explain a little more about how the world works and unfortunately get rid of some of that negativity which is really nice... it would be nice to be really naive and innocent, but you can't. Well I guess you can, but it costs a lot!
> I like to give people a taste of unconditional trust which I don't even have in my own life really... trust is an important component of solid relationships and it takes a long long time to build up again...
> ....all of those things, and I think you have to make a choice... I guess you could make a huge choice in your life and say yes... I am going to go for this no matter what happens, or smaller ones...Yes ... I am going to go for this in certain situations with certain people...with whatever I feel comfortable with or whatever I can handle. S6, T1, P5

Interpreting the voices of the women, it would seem that hope had a chapter in their narrative. Still, the stories reverberated with the wonder of how it will all turn out. It was a twisting, turning plot with points of common human struggle. The women, as the protagonists, collaborated with multiple authors, composed a life, improvised on the journey, outlined the context for picking out the heroes and the anti-heroes, and crafted the beginning, the middle, the next chapter of the story. The stories have not ended, and although the conversations were difficult to stop, one was inexplicably terminated. It was a tender reminder of one intrepid search for a safer home. To Althea, the last word is given:

> Yes. Take care of your body...take care of your mental, emotional, physical health so that you are... not dependent... you don't give control ...of your life... to someone else. S5, T1, P41

Summary

Their stories, in the telling and retelling, were unique and varied and yet common ground was covered. The conversations about the notion of safety for three women who had left abusive relationships had a common starting point. The women all found it compelling to recall events in their childhood that marked that feeling of being safe. Then they could describe the art of going to the place in their mind where they felt safe. As children, they all practised ways to achieve this presence or state of mind. They well understood the importance of using their imagination to escape fear, disappointments and uncertainty.

Physical and psychological safety was eroded in their young adult years.

All shared the experience of social isolation and in their crises, they found their limits. None of them lost the capacity to go to that safe place in their minds. It was an essential state which could be accessed to sustain the actions required to take some control in a disillusioned life. This sense of safety held them through their grief and loss.

The emotional detachment from the physical danger was common, the resolve to stick to the decision to stay safe was shared and they lived with the same grinding conditions that resulted. Safe for further self-analysis. All the women were somewhat surprised to realize that they had not known themselves very well, discovered that they could get to know themselves better and this identity figured prominently in imagining what it took to stay safe. The internal place was now accompanied by a safer external home for their children and themselves.

Successfully leaving the violence behind them, they were alert to the bigger world, accepting the notion that they could rely on themselves to control their safety and well being.

There were waves of humility, doubt and anxiety but they **knew** themselves and their experience taught them to feel hopeful, believing in the possibility of a safer future. They understood that safety was not just an external condition it was an internal state and that it was best understood in a context - connected to the human spirit and in turn to a higher order. They were women who essentially felt safer believing in the goodness of people.

CHAPTER SEVEN

DISCUSSION

It was difficult to end the conversations, to draw this study to a close. I have been left with more to think about than I have to offer in conclusion. But I am left with the obligation to discuss the limitations, validity and reliability of this research.

Limitations of This Study

This research was guided by the perspective that because all knowledge and experience are connected to phenomena, things in consciousness that appear in the surrounding world, inevitably a unity must exist between ourselves as knowers and the things or objects that we come to know and depend upon (Moustaka, 1994). The purpose of such phenomenological research is to explore meaning. Phenomenological studies are driven by an interest in understanding lived experience. van Manen (1990) described it thus:

> In doing this research we question the world's very secrets and intimacies which are constitutive of the world, and which bring the world as a world into being for us and in us. Then research is a caring act: we want to know that which is most essential to being. (p. 5)

The task is to examine the natural, pre-theoretical world, the concrete world as it were, and to explicate the fundamental meanings of experience. It is at this more primordial level of consciousness that we construct a meaningful foundation from which to interpret and understand our experience.

Phenomenological studies are concerned with "what" constitutes a particular experience (Polkinghorne, 1989), in this case the experience of safety for women who have been abused by their husbands. However, such experience can only be examined retrospectively (van Manen, 1990). This perspective limits the scope and purpose of phenomenological research to questions of "what" and "how" rather than "why."

This study is limited by a descriptive account of the women, somewhere between forty and fifty years of age, who have left abusive husbands. These experiences may or may not differ from the experiences of younger women, older women, or women who do not leave. This study is not conducted to determine the effect or consequences of abuse upon individuals. Its purpose is to better understand the phenomenon as experienced.

Analysis of these descriptions is limited by my own presuppositional foundations as well as my interpretive abilities. I hold certain assumptions when I enter into the research and I am restricted by my own understandings of both the text (data) and the method of data analysis. As van Manen (1990) points out, we have to remain aware that lived life is always more complex than any explanation of meaning can reveal, that the reduction of the phenomenon can never be complete, and that full or final descriptions are unattainable. He calls for extra vigor in the pursuit of such projects.

Interpretations are anchored in time and therefore limited by a particular historical, sociological, and psychological context. Although the data must

speak for themselves, these data will continue to speak, and a decision to "close the conversation" is more a function of practical considerations than an acknowledgment that this is the final word about the particular experiences of these women. It is likely that future interpretations of these texts, or similar texts, will vary and reveal yet another side of the women's experience with the notion of safety.

Validity and Reliability

One of the paradigm-related beliefs that affects how people react to the qualitative data is how people think about the idea of truth. Agonizing over whether I thought that I had uncovered patterns that were true, although tempting, seemed beyond the grasp of the experiences that I heard. I could not escape my point of view nor live outside my own time. My perspective was to do the best job I could in describing the patterns that appeared to me in the data, and to present those patterns as my perspective on the experiences of the women based on my analysis and interpretation of the data. Pragmatic validation, as defined by Patton (1990), is left. I adopted the perspective that the study is judged by its relevance to and use by those to whom it is presented.

Questions of generalizability and replicability must address the validity and reliability of the essence of an experience. As a result reliability is inextricably tied to validity (Wertz, 1986). If a description of an experience is accepted as valid, it is expected that the essential elements (themes) of that experience to rise up out of the particulars, to be present in all valid accounts of

that experience. In this sense, all valid descriptions of an experience are reliable. Reliability has no significance without validity. It is not a question of whether an experience can be recounted several times verbatim, but rather whether or not the essential themes of the experience are present in each account. The diversity of the accounts of an experience can be used to confirm the essence of the experience. Several stories of an experience, differing in both fact and context, can be the same in meaning. The phenomenological method attempts to bring out the consistency of essence, not facts.

The procedures outlined in Chapter Three were adopted to render a valid analysis of this study: bracketing, within-person validity checks and between-person validity checks. The remaining test of validity rests with the reader.

However, because hermeneutic interpretation is contextually bound, it does not imply runaway relativism but rather, it suggests that the study must be evaluated on it own merits (Gergen, 1985). The notion of hermeneutics or interpretation already implies the acknowledgment of distortion, incomplete knowing (van Manen, 1990). Just as Gadamer (1986) distinguishes between two senses of interpretation: pointing to something and pointing out the meaning of something, this study described the notion of safety and interpreted that notion in the context of their accounts. It is only our interpretation of experience that we share with each other, and we can only do that in retrospect.

Our mutual understanding of any human experience relies on our empathic generalizability.

Some Final Thoughts

I do not presume that this dissertation is a document of original thought. The previous discussion is imbedded in the ideas of many. Much of the writing has been abstract in its analysis even while being so personal in its content. It is apparent, just as many practitioners remark, that philosophic thought such as that which has been explored in this text, is somewhat esoteric, cut off from "real" life. Yet without some other framework, we practitioners may be removed from the invisible aspects of a woman's life. Upon reflection, it has been this linking of "theory to practice" that has enriched my experience. The women brought to life what too easily and thoughtlessly can spill from our mouths. The phrases, the words, the clichés like oppression, domestic violence, marginalization, patriarchy, victim, survivors of abuse, were all examples of labels, descriptors, including social theory catch-phrases, that I adopted to organize the content for this study. I have come to appreciate that these words represented some complex and controversial theoretical notions.

As such, the words gave me emotional distance, supplied me with a cognitive framework to interpret the research literature and my own abstract thinking processes. But the words alone did not draw me **into** the meaning of such an ordinary phenomenon. Their words and the eloquence of the

conversation with the women did. Having had these experiences, I now believe I am awakened to the woman when she describes what she thinks about when she is not safe. I do not immediately tag a single or simple label to a story of abuse, abandonment, secrets, shame. I now reflect on how she kept safe, stayed alive. I can sit with my uncertainty when she remembers her "knowing" about her safety in the past, her safety now, and the complexity of her safety in the future.

I understand more clearly the limitations of any one of my responses to danger, to threat, to violence. As an activist, however, I am clearly more certain of the need to anticipate the impact of our interpersonal and cultural patterns and to contribute constructive safer practices in our most everyday interactions. Each safe experience we have accumulates, gives space and opportunity for a better personal and social analysis of our value, and, thus opens our minds and our hearts to a desire for well-being in all of our relationships. The very nature of this belief is at once simple and complex, but not beyond my imagination.

Engagement with the methodological theory while I read the text of our conversations gave permission to pause, to think again. The circles of her interpretations, my renderings, her reflections, my urgency to return to the question, her grace to move the story forward, all have layered the complexity of the everyday word. Yet, somehow the layering has added clarity to the notion of safety. I have agonized over the potential that I might reduce all meaning to

some level of banality as I yearned to disentangle myself from the words that obfuscated. But slowly the abstractions melted into the meaning and something else was understood.

In spite of such complexity, this rethinking, this "something else," gave me hope, an unanticipated outcome from the study. I now believe I can come closer to her experience, because I believe **she** can reveal it. She made it visible, partly because I tried to leave behind those words that interfered and rendered her experience unintelligible to me. To my consternation, she told me more about **how** her experience gave her hope. My surprise is such that a crack has formed on the shell of my protective cynicism and disdain for the impact of violence of our culture. I sense a shift in my anger and pain. These women have transformed my sense of the future just as feeling safer transformed theirs.

However, it has been more than the re-examination of words and their meaning that has made a difference for me. The "wasting of time" to listen, to read, to reread, to listen again many times, has informed me as a researcher, as a teacher, as an advocate, and as a therapist. I had assumed that hearing yet more painful stories would make me more world-weary. I had not counted on the inspiration the conversations would generate in me. I had not realized the pleasure of taking all the time there is to sit with thoughts, with feelings, with sensations around a "simple" notion.

The method of interview and transcription adopted in this study has, for me, shaped a path in future therapeutic work and in participation in social action research models. The women spoke of the value of the text, the chance to "see" their experience, to read the text. Their enthusiasm has been such that it compels further examination. In contrast to being in typical therapy sessions, the women saw value in participating in research that meant taking their words "home with them." The iterative process opened new perspectives for me as well. It was revealing to re-think the path of the interview. There was a map at my disposal. The text uncovered what shaped the content, what was explored, was ignored, what was unfinished, what was repeated. Each reading prompted fresh thoughts, different questions, new avenues to run down. Again the outcome offered hope. The content had more ways to engage me, to hone my skills as a research interviewer, a therapist and as a teacher. Re-reading the transcripts reminded me of the value of looking back at the "work" so that I could learn what I might do to move forward. Repeating a process did not have to mean wasting time, covering the same ground, getting stuck. It could mean increased empathy, greater clarity, new and different actions. New habits that seem worthy of adoption. It taught me to remember to pay attention, not to take things for granted. Not only was I more fully aware of the process of an interview, but also the qualities that distinguish it from a casual conversation. Each woman spoke about the importance of the conversation "being about me" for a little while but I, too, gained insight when I could assist in that focus "about

them." This iterative method provided a tool I can continue to use to craft my competence as an interviewer.

Although, it was hoped that the examination of these women's stories would help to illustrate experiences of safety as "real," as lived, I believe it has also had a transformational aspect in the telling. I am changed by the research experience as a whole. The women who participated in the process tell me "it" has changed them. Is it possible that struggling to reveal the experience together has shifted some belief, some view, some way of knowing the world, however slightly? What else could have influenced our notion that something had changed? A question for yet further research.

It is not clear whether the reader can be changed by the words in this dissertation, but the intention was, at best, to provoke further thought. Further thought can lead to more and better research investigations. The many aspects (themes) described by only a few women in this study offer windows to get a different view. Questions we need to ask are on the horizon. Assuming that we value social science research as one means to improve our lives, applying this knowledge calls forth continued attention to the elements and the capacities we have to be the agents of change, in a world that, at times, seems less life-giving and abundant.

I wrote of experiences of safety as a way of developing new perspectives. This project has been grounded by some attempt to explain the "old experience." I am not sure that anyone, after having experienced a sense of

safety, can adequately suggest an answer that explains the former state. We can not experience the pre-safety. I do, however, offer the following. A safe life is not a contemplative life. Questions, reflections, thinking without acting, have less value. The safe life demands answers. Therefore to "escape" safety one must encourage questions without answers. Through questioning we can open ourselves to the essence of the "everydayness" of safety, we can find ourselves taking up a freer position. In revealing the essence of safety we can let go of a "worldview of safety." As a researcher, advocate, woman, therapist, teacher, mother, wife, sister, friend, daughter, I live in an emerging awareness of that experience.

More specifically, the project has brought me back to my concern that we must be more aware of what we experience in the presence of violence. We have yet to find social practices that limit violence against women and children. This realization reminds me that we must consider the conventional and emerging theories about women and violence with new vigor. I realized that I had become insensitive to such well-used slogans as "domestic abuse," "systemic violence," "victims of abuse," "perpetrators of abuse," to name but a few code words that made the meaning invisible for me, cutting off my understanding of those who are often silenced by their abuse. This separation is dangerous for the women and children. It can lead practitioners and academics, alike, to the perpetuation of violence by the creation of false myths, the generation of common stereotypes, the perversion of social practices, and

the creation of new social control methods that preserve the imbalance of power. It is this recognition of the impact of separate knowledge that is a call to action for me as researcher as well.

As social scientists, we have not examined in any great detail the experience of men and women who have relinquished their lives to abuse, whether by design or accident. We have not examined in detail the experience of men and women who take full responsibility for a non-abusive life. I believe, even more strongly now, that those researchers who take up this call to such complex social questions can be guided by valuing the personal experience, bringing it to mutual analysis with their participants and, together, anticipating the pitfalls of over-simplification of theory and practice as they struggle to contribute to positive social change.

We make use of the notion of safety to transcend the human condition, but in escaping violence and abuse we are caught up by the conditions of safety. As practitioners and advocates, we must be doubly cautious of our use of so called "constructs of safety." Cautious about imposing technical, practical, physical or social mechanisms designed to assist or replace human decision making. Cautious about institutionalizing some social practices, some worldview, that dominates and becomes perverted in yet new ways. As a practitioner, I must remember that it is not a question of women having to pass or fail some "safety test" to be eligible for help, support, guidance, aid. As a teacher I am reminded of my obligation to present ways of approaching

knowledge that must simultaneously and actively embrace the experience of the learner with the content, rather than judging whether it is safe to "teach" those ideas to which students. It is a question of having the freedom and choice to act with empathy and wisdom in the human experience.

It is my hope that the readers of this research take whatever part of the document stimulates thought and examine that thought in relation to their own practice. I would like to think that the work engaged the reader rather than satisfied. I believe that the women I talked to did just that for me and for themselves. I believe that they were generous, in the hope that the ideas would be taken by others in the spirit of reflection and action, action and reflection, in ever widening circles. Circles that might embrace a safer future for their children and mine. It is hoped that this thesis has illustrated experiences of safety as "real," as lived even as the themes have been extracted for more conceptual examination. By describing the experience as lived, it is hoped that the reader is drawn to the transformational nature of finding greater safety in the everyday.

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APPENDIX I

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

RESEARCH PROJECT: THE MEANING OF SAFETY FOR WOMEN WHO HAVE BEEN ABUSED

INVESTIGATOR: E. ANNE HUGHSON
PH.D. CANDIDATE

AGENCY: UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

This consent form, copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process for informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of the nature and purpose of the research project and what your participation will involve. Your copy of the research proposal gives more detail. If you would like more clarification or further information, please feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully to understand the information. I am available to read the form with you if you require.

The purpose of the study is to try and understand what you, who have accessed a shelter, interpret personal safety to mean in relation to your experiences with friends, relatives, and others.

1. Specifically, the project asks you to discuss your experiences and interpretation of personal safety in relation to your friends, relatives, and others. These interviews will vary and in length and number. These conversations will be informal and open-ended. They will take place at a time and place most convenient for you. The conversation will be tape-recorded and will typed up word for word by a transcriber who will not know your name.

2. Determine, with me, the meaning of the transcripts in relation to your experiences of safety and support from friends, relatives, and others.

The benefit to you may be more personal awareness about your understanding of safety and support. I will also share all findings with you.

Possible risk to you may come from having shared your personal stories Ywith me, being asked to examine with me their meaning for you, and the investment of personal time required. To guard against this causing any breech of privacy I will ensure that your material remains confidential and anonymous.

I will erase all tapes as soon as transcribed, using a coding name, instead of your real name, keep all information in a locked file, and destroy any personally identifiable information in the files when you stop participating. The code that links your identity to the transcripts will be kept separate from the data in a locked file and will be destroyed when you stop participating in the study.

I am asking you to agree to participate in this research. I appreciate your participation, but remind you that you are free to change your mind and stop participating at any time. I also reserve the right to terminate the research in the interest of the participant, the project, or myself. Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood the information regarding your participation and agree to participate. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigator or involved agencies from their legal and professional responsibilities.

Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

The results of this research project may be published or reported to government agencies, funding agencies, or scientific groups. However, your name will not, in any way, be associated with any publication or report.

I understand the purpose and risks associated with participating in this research and agree to participate. I also understand that I may stop participating at any time without penalty.

Signature: _____ Signature of Witness: _____

Date: _____ Date: _____

If you have any questions, please call me, Anne Hughson, at 220-6273